

BIODIVERSITY

Beavers make better ponds

Beavers are the archetypal ecosystem engineers. And new research shows that the ponds and wetlands they create with their dam-building endeavours support more species than do similar habitats where the rodents are absent.

Scottish biologists carried out research in Sweden, where beavers are more plentiful than in Scotland, so they could make direct comparisons between wetlands with and without beavers.

They found that the number of species of aquatic plants and water beetles is 50 per cent higher in the beaver ponds – which have plenty of dead wood around, providing a greater variety of spaces for species to live and hide.

“The loss of large mammals from modern landscapes is a global conservation concern,” says Nigel Willby of the University of Stirling. “These animals are important in their own right, but our research emphasises the added biodiversity benefits that go with them.” **S Blackman**

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The reintroduction of beavers could end up benefiting wider biodiversity.

TRUTH OR FICTION?

Hollywood is driving species to extinction

Are people really inspired to buy endangered species just because they've seen them on the big screen?



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NO, ACCORDING TO NEW RESEARCH. After the 2003 release of *Finding Nemo*, the blockbuster movie about a lost clownfish, newspapers reported that tropical reef fish populations were being plundered to satisfy a surge in demand. Campaigns were launched; celebrities and conservationists jumped on board. Since



There are fewer people trying to find Nemo than you might think.

then, other films, too, have been accused of triggering a 'Nemo effect' – the Harry Potter series, *Zootopia* and *Finding Dory* reportedly threatened wild populations of owls, fennec foxes and blue tang fish.

“These stories are often based on a single pet shop saying that they're suddenly seeing high demand for blue tangs or owls or whatever,” says University of Oxford zoologist Diogo Verissimo. “We have to be incredibly careful about generalising from such reports.”

Indeed, his research finds little evidence for an increase in either demand or supply. Instead, he says that post-release spikes in online searches for the species probably reflect an upswing of awareness.

Unquestioning belief in the Nemo effect can have undesirable consequences, not least for livelihoods, Verissimo says. “Some Pacific island states have clamped down on trade with marine aquaria based on this perceived effect.” **S Blackman**