A history of beavers in Britain
This comprehensive and easy-to-follow unit provides pupils with an understanding of the Eurasian beaver's history in Britain and its importance in the modern day.

This unit is perfect for schools that are local to beaver populations on nearby rivers and/or recent reintroductions.

These lessons directly link to the KS2 History National Curriculum in England.

These lessons/activities are appropriate for
- Use as isolated lessons
- Use in conjunction with cross-curricular learning (see other subject/lesson packs and plans from Beaver Trust)
- Use as a final write in a longer teaching sequence (the lesson plan provided can be extended and adapted)

Unit Description
This unit is an enquiry-based, chronological study of the history of the Eurasian beaver, *Castor fiber*, in Britain.

The study begins with an overview of the Eurasian beaver (including their status as a keystone species and positive ecological impacts) and its history in Britain. The unit then continues chronologically, from beavers' evolution, significance in Ancient Britain and subsequent extinction in Britain (Scotland, England and Wales) in the 1600s. In doing so, pupils will investigate various sources, which provide evidence that beavers were once widespread in Britain and the reasons for their extinction. The unit concludes with modern-day reintroduction efforts across Britain.

National Curriculum (England) Links
- A local history study: a study over time tracing how several aspects of national history are reflected in the locality (this can go beyond 1066).

With reference to:
- Britain from the Stone Age to the Iron Age.
- A study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils’ chronological knowledge beyond 1066.
Unit Endpoints
By the end of the unit, pupils making a good level of progress will:
- Describe and explain (chronologically) the history of the Eurasian Beaver.
- Note connections, contrasts and trends over time in relation to the history of the Eurasian beaver.
- Ask and address historically valid questions about change, cause, similarity, difference and significance in relation to the history of the Eurasian beaver in Britain.
- Use a range of sources relating to the Eurasian beaver to construct knowledge and understanding of the past.

This pack contains 4 lessons and activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson 1</th>
<th>An Overview. What are beavers and where did they go?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 2</td>
<td>Prehistoric Britain. When did beavers appear in Britain?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 3</td>
<td>Ancient Britain to the Stuarts. Have beavers and humans lived harmoniously in the past?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson 4</td>
<td>Restoring Historic Beaver Populations. How and why are beavers being reintroduced in Britain?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Beaver Chronology Overview

Source: beavertrust.org
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eurasian Beaver (<em>Castor fiber</em>)</td>
<td>Europe's largest rodent (distinguished from the American beaver (<em>Castor canadensis</em>)).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keystone species</td>
<td>An organism that supports and helps to define an entire ecosystem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wetland</td>
<td>An area of land either seasonally or permanently inundated by water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dam</td>
<td>A barrier to hold back water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecosystem</td>
<td>A biological community of organisms that interact and their physical environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lesson 1: An Overview. What are beavers and where did they go?

| Learning Outcome | I know what beavers are and some of their key features. I know how beavers became extinct in Britain. |

**Use accompanying Beaver Trust KS2 History teaching slides for this lesson.**

**Lesson plan**

1. **Post the question "What are beavers?" to the pupils**  
   Pupils may draw on prior or cross-curricular learning.

2. **Use accompanying teaching slides** to explain that there are two types of beavers and outline some of their key characteristics.

3. **Examine beaver habitats** with reference to slide 11: ‘Pile of sticks? Or a beaver dam?’

4. **Refer to the fact that beavers became extinct in Britain** approximately 400 years ago using slides 13 to 15.

5. **Watch the animation** ‘Beavers: Nature's Ecosystem Engineers’ for an overview.

**Activity 1**

Make your own fact file poster about beavers

**It must include:**
- Information about beavers, including their habitats and some of their features. You might also include how some of their features have adapted to suit their environment.
- Information about how and why beavers became extinct in Britain.

**Your poster needs to be informative and eye-catching.**
Lesson 2: Prehistoric Britain. When did beavers appear in Britain?

**Learning Outcome**

I can use historical sources to construct an understanding of the past. I can ask and address historically valid questions.

Use accompanying Beaver Trust KS2 History teaching slides for this lesson.

**Lesson plan**

1. **Refer to the beaver history timeline**: explain to pupils that today's lesson will focus on ancient beavers around the world and their evolution. The lesson also refers to how we have developed an understanding of ancient beavers and how they have evolved.

2. **On slides 23 and 24, allow time for discussion of questions**

   Reference can be made at this point for this lesson's independent learning activity (pupils can note down similarities and differences during class discussion now or at the end of input).

3. **On slide 25, again ask pupils for similarities and differences** between skulls and highlight that they are acting as historians by asking questions and identifying similarities and differences to make sense of artefacts.

**Activity 2**

What are the similarities and differences between giant and Eurasian beavers?

What are the similarities and differences between their skulls and skeletons on slide 38?

Use the artefacts to help you.
Lesson 3: Ancient Britain to the Stuarts. Have beavers and humans lived harmoniously in the past?

| Learning Outcome | I can use historical sources to construct an understanding of the past. I can note connections, contrasts and trends over time in relation to the history of the Eurasian beaver. |

Use accompanying Beaver Trust KS2 History teaching slides for this lesson.

This lesson is about human-beaver interactions throughout history and directly references their extinction, through the use of artwork as a historical source.

Lesson plan

1. Take pupils through the slides, where there are multiple opportunities for whole-class discussion and analysis of different forms of historical artwork, which gives clues about the reason for beavers’ disappearance in Britain.

2. Use the questions on the slides to drive discussion

Activity 3

Write a newspaper article about the day beavers became extinct in Britain

It must include:
- Information about what beavers are and where they live
- Reasons for why they have become extinct.
- Information about the impact of this extinction on Britain and its wildlife.
Lesson 4: Restoring Historic Beaver Populations. How and why are beavers being reintroduced in Britain?

Learning Outcome

I can note connections, contrasts and trends over time in relation to the history of the Eurasian beaver.

Use accompanying Beaver Trust KS2 History teaching slides for this lesson.

This lesson focuses on the reintroduction of beavers in Britain.

Lesson plan

1 Take pupils through the slides
   Make reference to beaver reintroductions on the timeline (see slide 62) and refer to prior learning about beavers in ancient Britain and their subsequent disappearance/extinction in Britain due to hunting.

2 Refer to the subsequent slide about how and where reintroductions are taking place and the impact of reintroductions on ecosystems.

Activity 4

Write the script for a newsreader who is breaking the news that beavers are living in Britain again

It must include:

- Information about what beavers are and where they live
- Reasons why beavers became extinct in the first place
- Reasons for how we know they lived in Britain for many years prior to their extinction (for example, fossil records)
- Information about reintroductions throughout Britain.

Next step: film your TV news report or share it in assembly!