

## REVIEWS

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*Beavers in Britain's Past.* By BRYONY COLES. 275mm. Pp ix + 242, b&w and col illus. Oxford: WARP Occasional Paper 19, Oxbow Books 2006. ISBN 978-1-842172-26-1. £40 (pbk).

In Britain, the Netherlands and many other countries there has been much debate about the reintroduction of wild mammal and bird species. In some cases the plans for reintroduction seem to be based more on emotions than on scientific research, and the archaeological data are either neglected or misinterpreted. Too often nature management and archaeozoology are two separate worlds – for which both parties are to blame.

In this respect, Bryony Coles's *Beavers in Britain's Past* shows how things should be. The history of beavers in Britain is very accurately reconstructed on the basis of a remarkable amount of data, providing a solid basis for reintroduction of the species. What makes this book really special, however, is the multi-disciplinary approach used by Coles. Field surveys carried out in Brittany and south-eastern France provided ample information on characteristic features and structures in beaver territories, as well as on the impact beavers may have on the landscape. This knowledge is used in identifying beaver activity in the archaeological record, carrying the evidence beyond bones and beaver-gnawed wood, and thus perfectly integrating field biology and archaeozoology.

Apart from discussing the traces of beavers in a number of archaeological sites, Coles describes the relationship between beavers and man. She makes it clear that humans may have benefited from the activities of beavers in many ways. Beavers were hunted for their meat, fur and castoreum (used for medicinal purposes) and artefacts were made from their teeth, claws and bones. But apart from that, the effect beaver activity has on the landscape may have been useful and attractive to humans. For instance, man may have benefited from the dead wood in a beaver territory as a source for fuel; beaver ponds attract fish, waterfowl and wild mammals, making them attractive for humans to catch food.

From the post-Roman period onwards, apart from archaeological material, other evidence is used for the presence of beavers, such as place-names, written records and oral traditions. Thus, integrating more disciplines into her research, the author proves that not only human exploitation of beavers becomes more diverse in the course of time but also the behaviour of beavers changes in response to human activity.

The ever-larger scale of wetland drainage from the medieval period onwards became a serious threat to beavers. In the course of the second millennium AD, physical evidence for beavers becomes more and more scarce, and by late in the millennium they seem to disappear. This does not mean, however, that they were extinct by then. Combining fieldwork experience with the evidence from place-names, documents, depictions and oral history, Coles argues that beavers have survived in places with natural pools, where there was no need for them to build dams. This made them far less visible to humans, and so beavers may have disappeared from human perception and lived on for many years before they eventually became extinct only a few centuries ago.

In short, *Beavers in Britain* is a classic example of multi-disciplinary research and should be read by everyone involved in archaeology, nature management and history.

J T ZEILER

*The Aegean from Bronze Age to Iron Age: continuity and change between the eighth and twelfth centuries BC.* By OLIVER DICKINSON. 234mm. Pp xvi + 298, ills. Abingdon: Routledge 2006. ISBN 978-0-415135-89-4: £65 (hdbk); ISBN 978-0-415135-90-0: £16.99 (pbk).

The Classical Greeks of the fifth and fourth centuries BC perceived their remote past to have roots in an age of heroes. Yet ancient authors placed little emphasis on the period after the 'Trojan War', a time when mass population dispersal and climatic upheaval reduced the