

## **Freshwater Habitats – Ariane Burgess**

Hello, my name is Ariane Burgess, and I am a Member of the Scottish Parliament for the Highlands and Islands region. I am also the Nature Champion for the Eurasian Beaver and Aspen.

[Sound of beaver chewing on twigs]

This is the sound of a beaver eating its lunch, and for the last five-hundred years, these sounds have been absent from our rivers and burns. Having been hunted to extinction in the UK, they were reintroduced to Scotland less than fifteen years ago, and they are once again making Scotland their home.

Scotland's freshwaters include our rivers, lochs, ponds and other wetlands. Healthy freshwaters are teeming with life, and they are key to Scotland's rich biodiversity and landscape.

Our rivers carve their way through valleys and glens. From fast-flowing mountain streams to slower, meandering channels, rivers are lifelines for many species, including our own, providing water, food, and shelter.

Lochs are also a key feature of Scotland's landscape. They vary in size and depth, ranging from small, serene lochans to vast bodies of water like Loch Ness and Loch Lomond. Ponds are still smaller bodies of still water, often found in woodlands, moorlands, and gardens.

Wetlands, on the other hand, can include marshes, swamps, bogs, and other waterlogged habitats. Alongside being important habitats, they play important roles in flood control and water purification.

However, the health of our freshwater habitats depends on reducing pollution, tackling climate change, and restoring river channels, floodplains, and the areas next to bodies of water.

We must take great care of our freshwaters to ensure they can continue to sustain our communities, wildlife, and landscapes into the future.