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# Water Vole Information and Education Pack

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## **Dedication**

This Water Vole Information and Habitat Pack is dedicated to Rob Strachan who worked tirelessly for the conservation of water voles and their habitat throughout his life and pioneered research and projects to ensure their long term survival.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank Peter White and John Davis for the use of their excellent illustrations, particularly in the Children's Resources section, which really bring the animals and their wetland habitats alive.

Thanks is also given to the Water Vole Patrol volunteers that come out and work, come rain or shine, in ditches and ponds, surveying and cutting back vegetation so that water voles have a safe place to live on the Manhood Peninsula.

# Introduction

Water voles are England's rarest and fastest declining mammal. The Manhood Peninsula is fortunate enough to have a persistent population of this rare creature living in the linked ponds and ditches. It is only by looking after these often overlooked sites that we will keep this cheeky guinea pig sized rodent living amongst us. Water voles are shy and secretive so can be difficult to spot, just the rustle of vegetation, the sound of a plop into the water or a fleeting glance as they swim rapidly away. This pack offers lots of information about water voles and where they live, how to spot a water vole and some activities based on water voles and their wetland habitats.

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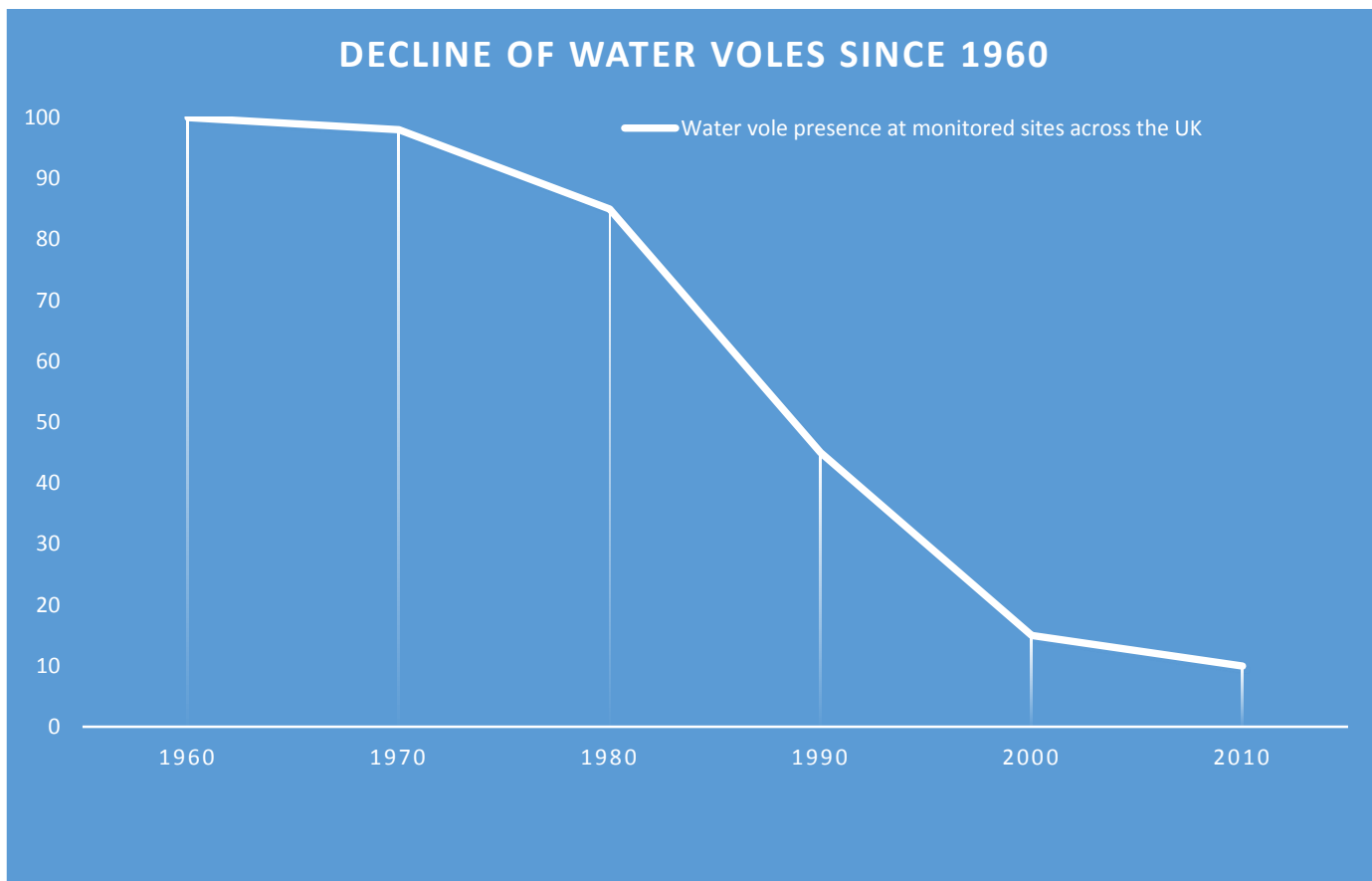
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## Section A – Information

### 1. Why are water voles important?

Until very recently, the water vole was considered to be common and widespread in the UK. Water voles have disappeared from 90% of the sites in England where they are previously known to have lived. The crash in water vole numbers has been one of the fastest and most severe of any mammal species in Britain and has happened mainly over the last twenty years. Water voles are now considered to be the fastest declining mammal in England.

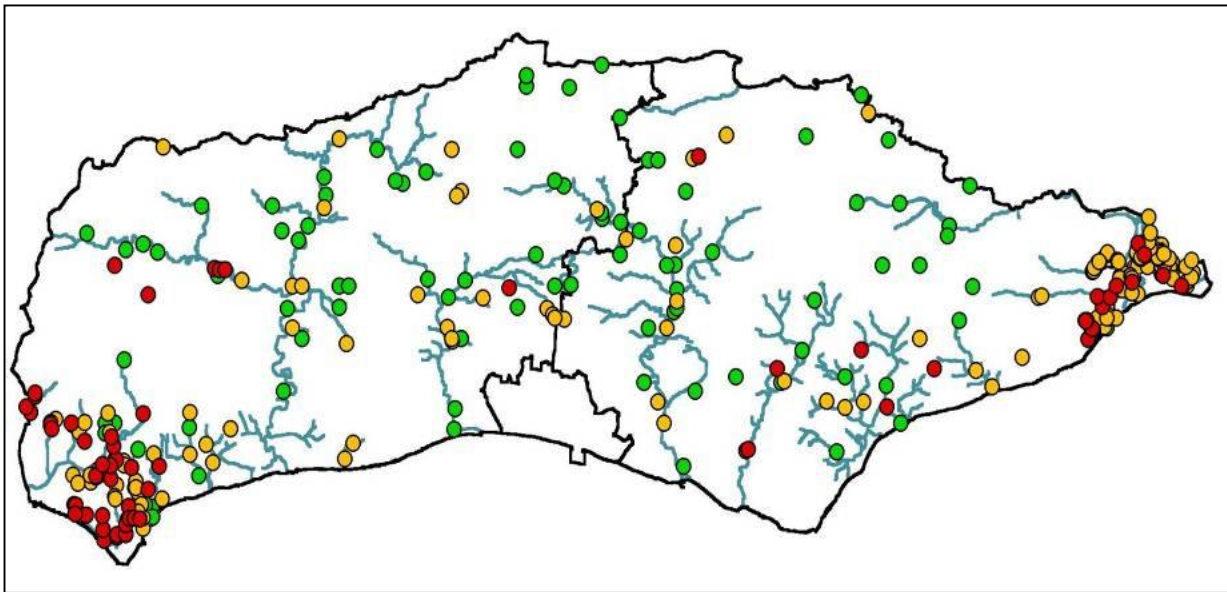


Water voles are a vital part of the wetland ecosystem. They eat a wide range of plants, preventing over domination by a single species and also play a role in the dispersal of seeds and rhizome roots. Water voles are an important prey species and food source for a large number of predators and without them other animals are put under pressure and the balance is lost in the ecosystem.

### 2. Water voles in Sussex

In Sussex, the first National Survey carried out during 1989/90 found that 71% of 63 sample sites had positive signs of water voles. By the time of the second National Survey, in 1996/98, only three sites were still positive. A report commissioned by the Environment Agency in 1998 concluded that the species was on the brink of countywide extinction (Ryland, 1998) and a 2013 report confirmed that there was still a decline despite a Biodiversity Species Action Plan being put in place both nationally and locally.

Currently in Sussex, we have confirmed populations of water voles on the Chichester and Pagham coastal plain, in the Rye harbour/Pett area, at Arundel Wildfowl Wetland centre (a re-introduced population) and on the Arun. There are a number of small colonies around Sussex such as Pevensey marshes but these populations are small and isolated. The long term survival of water voles is dependent on joining these populations up so that colonies become resistant to environmental change and allow genetic mixing.



- + ○ + ○ Water vole records 30 years ago
- + ○ Water vole records 20 years ago
- Water vole records 10 years ago

Map from Sussex Wildlife Trust 2010

This diagram shows that water vole numbers have declined over the last 30 years and there is a Biodiversity Action Plan in place to try and halt this trend and to stabilise the population. The Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group are focussing on water vole living on the Manhood Peninsula and working with landowners and other interested groups to ensure their long term survival.

### 3. Legal status

Previously only water vole habitat was protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 5, making it an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which water voles used for shelter and protection, and to disturb a water vole while using such a place. From 6th April 2008, under Section 9 of the Act the water vole was fully covered by law. This increased legal protection added prohibitions against intentional killing, taking or injury, possession and sale of water voles.

**Under this legislation it is illegal to handle a water vole, or survey for one by trapping without a licence. Licenses are issued by Natural England.**





## 4. Water vole appearance

- Water voles are the largest member of the vole family and range from around 60g (young) to 380g in weight.
- They generally have a rich brown coat, more reddish on the back and greyer on the stomach area. Very rarely, and in Scottish populations, they can be black.
- Adult water voles measure about 29cm (11 inches) nose to tail and can be confused with brown rats (*Rattus norvegicus*) which are about the same size.



Water Voles (*Arvicola amphibius*)

## 5. A case of mistaken identity!

### Other British voles



#### Bank voles (*Clethrionomys glareolus*)

- Bank voles are the smallest vole in Britain.
- They are only about 11cm long and weigh around 30g (a water vole can weigh up to 360g)
- They tend to live away from water in hedgerows and woodlands because they eat mainly nuts, seeds and hedgerow fruits.



#### (Short tailed) Field voles (*Microtus agrestis*)

- Field voles are slightly bigger than bank voles but weigh less than 60g – the weight of a baby water vole.
- Field voles live in rough grassland and sometimes on the water's edge in similar places to water voles.
- They leave cut piles of vegetation like water voles, but only about 3cm long and usually roughly cut.

## 6. The difference between water voles and rats

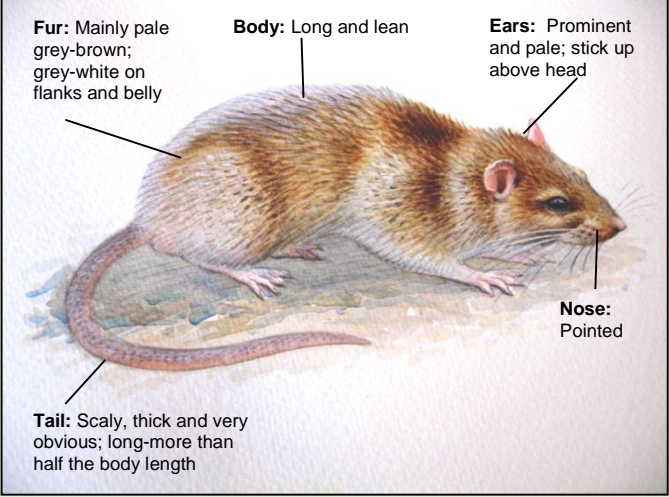
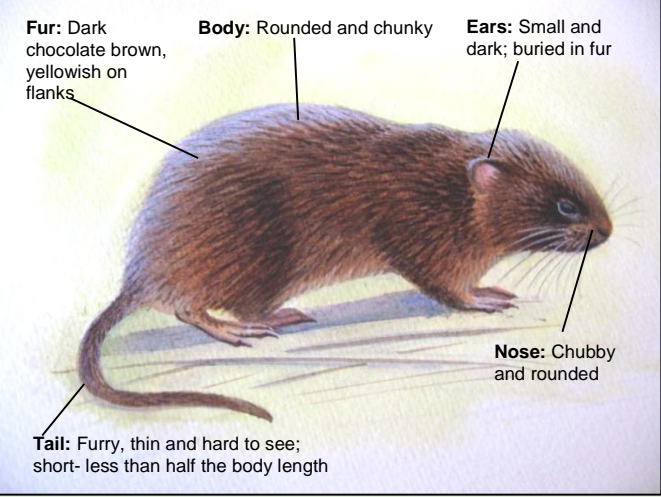
**Brown rat**



**Water vole**





<h2>BROWN RAT <i>Rattus norvegicus</i></h2>	<h2>WATER VOLE <i>Arvicola amphibius</i></h2>
	
<p><b>Fur:</b> Mainly pale grey-brown; grey-white on flanks and belly.</p> <p><b>Body:</b> Long and lean.</p> <p><b>Tail:</b> Scaly, thick and very obvious; long-more than half the body length.</p> <p><b>Ears:</b> Prominent and pale; stick up.</p> <p><b>Nose:</b> Pointed</p>	<p><b>Fur:</b> Dark chocolate brown, yellowish on flanks.</p> <p><b>Body:</b> Rounded and chunky.</p> <p><b>Tail:</b> Furry, thin and hard to see; short – less than half the body length.</p> <p><b>Ears:</b> Small and dark; buried in fur.</p> <p><b>Nose:</b> Chubby and rounded.</p>
<p><b>Size:</b> 12 inches / 210-290mm.</p> <p><b>Weight:</b> 500g</p>	<p><b>Size:</b> 10 inches / 220mm.</p> <p><b>Weight:</b> 240 – 330g</p>
<p><b>WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON LAND?</b> The rat's prominent ears and long, scaly tail are key identification features.</p>	<p><b>WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON LAND?</b> The blunt head, brown fur and short, hairy tail that's hard to see.</p>
<p><b>WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN WATER?</b> Rats can also swim well but with a clear hip movement. However, unlike water voles, they won't dive if alarmed.</p>	<p><b>WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN WATER?</b> Swims well and smoothly with a paddle and dives with a loud 'plop' if alarmed.</p>
<p><b>ANY OTHER SIGNS?</b> Oval black droppings with a pointy end, singularly or in pairs, very smelly, and burrows with obvious trails.</p>	<p><b>ANY OTHER SIGNS?</b> Substantial piles of green/brown droppings, approx. 6-12mm and 3mm long, at the water's edge. Water voles also eat aquatic vegetation and leave piles of bits. Their burrows have runs and sometimes have lawns around them and can be stoppered in winter.</p>
<p><b>RAT FACTS</b> <b>Males</b> can be up to 50cm long (head and body 25cm, tail about the same). <b>Females</b> are smaller but it is difficult to tell the sexes apart. <b>Found</b> close to human habitation – around buildings, farmyards, rubbish tips and gardens, also urban waterways. <b>Tracks</b> similar to a water vole's but larger. <b>Behaviour</b> mainly solitary and diurnal. <b>Breeds</b> all year around.</p>	<p><b>WATER VOLE FACTS</b> <b>Males</b> can be up to 20cm long (head and body); tail half the length of a rat's. <b>Females</b> are smaller but look identical to the males. <b>Found</b> in and around rivers, ditches, ponds and along urban waterways. <b>Tracks</b> are distinctive and forefeet have four toes making a star like formation. <b>Behaviour</b> colonial and largely nocturnal. <b>Breeds</b> - March to September.</p>



## 7. Habitat and home range



- Ideal water vole habitat is a slow flowing waterway with permanent water, which does not flood for more than a week or so at a time.
- Water voles prefer lush vegetation along the banks of ditches, rifes, reedbeds, streams, canals, marshes, ponds and rivers, and they particularly like reeds, rushes and sedges.
- Their burrows are found at the waters edge, usually on a steep bank of 45° or more. Holes are found above and below water, and up to 3m back into the bank.
- They do not like gravelly or rocky substrates, and tend to burrow in earth or sand.
- Between March and September water voles establish territories for breeding. The size of territories varies according to habitat and season and can range from between 20-300m.
- Water voles have been known to search up to 1km for a new territory but this is highly unusual and their populations usually expand in a linear fashion from existing populations.
- Water voles tend to avoid crossing dry land at all costs but will use dry ditches with vegetation and hedgerows for cover if moving is necessary.
- Water voles will spend about one quarter of any 24-hour period outside their burrows; feeding, collecting vegetation and patrolling their territories.
- In winter very little is known about water vole activity. They do not hibernate, but they become less active and do not breed.



## 8. Water vole habitat on the Manhood Peninsula

Water voles live in a variety of places on the Manhood Peninsula. Their ideal habitat is often cited as large reed beds and wetland areas but these conditions are not available on the peninsula and so water voles have adapted to living in the connected network of ditches, rifes (larger water channel), ponds and the Chichester canal. This adds up to many tens of kilometres of riparian habitat and allows water voles to be mobile when responding to drought, flooding and other disturbance events.



**Chichester canal**



**Farm and village ponds**



**Rifes**



**Farm drainage ditches**



**Reed beds**



**Brackish lagoons**



## 9. Feeding

- Water voles are predominantly herbivores and eat almost any available lush green vegetation, with 227 known species sampled. Favourites are grasses, rushes and reeds and things like foals watercress, branched bur reed and water parsnip.
- In winter their diet changes and they eat tree bark, roots, tubers and fallen autumn fruits.
- Occasionally they will eat invertebrates e.g. freshwater snails, carrion and occasionally fish.
- They feed sitting on their haunches and cut vegetation to lengths of about 8-10cm long with a 45° angle cut which they leave in distinctive piles by the water.
- Water voles need a good range of vegetation in their habitat so that they have access to fresh lush plants all year round. This requires the banks to have a good range of plants to support their feeding needs.



## 10. Breeding and life cycle

- Water voles can produce up to five litters per year of up to eight young per litter.
- The young are born between March and September after a gestation period of around 20 days and are tiny, hairless and blind.
- Young are weaned after 2 weeks and are often independent within 18 days.
- In captivity, water voles have been known to live up to 5 years, but in the wild their average life expectancy is 6 months.
- Mortality is high in water voles and often 85%+ of the population is lost overwinter.
- Everything likes to eat water voles and the list is large - domestic cats, dogs, mink, herons, foxes, pike, weasels, hawks and owls, and otters!





# 11. Facts about water voles

- Water voles are currently England's fastest declining native mammal and are now considered rare with total extinction in many counties.
- They are active during the day.
- Water voles eat over 227 species of plant.
- Willow, hawthorn and crab apple trees are some of their favourite winter nibbles!
- They have been spotted as much as 3 metres up a tree!
- They have to eat 80% of their body weight a day to survive.
- Water voles have very strong sharp teeth that have enamel coated in iron to make them very hard. They use their teeth for digging burrows, chopping up plant stems and stripping bark off trees.
- Water voles try to avoid predators by jumping in the water and kicking mud in the face of their predators to confuse them.
- The main threat to water voles today is that many of their natural wetland areas have been altered and destroyed. This means that the remaining populations are fragmented and at risk from predation, particularly by mink, and environmental events such as flooding and drought.



© Colin Burdon

# 12. How to spot a water vole - useful field signs

Water voles have been immortalised as ‘Ratty’ in Kenneth Graemes ‘Wind in the Willows’. Although members of the rodent family, they are not rats but voles. There are a number of distinctive field signs that can be used to find them.

## ‘PLOP’

Water voles make a distinctive ‘plop’ as they drop into the water. This is thought to be a warning to other voles.

# Plop!

## Water vole lawns

When water voles are breeding, the female eats the grass around the entrance of her burrow so that she doesn’t have to stray too far from her young. This makes the area outside of the burrow look very neat like a lawn. It is also thought that water voles clear the area around the burrow entrance so that they have a good view before exiting.



## Latrines

Water voles leave droppings in piles to mark their territory when they are breeding. These are called latrines.

Droppings are about 1cm long and 5mm wide with blunt ends. When dry you can break them open and they have concentric rings almost like tree rings! They do not smell but you still need to wash your hands if you touch them!

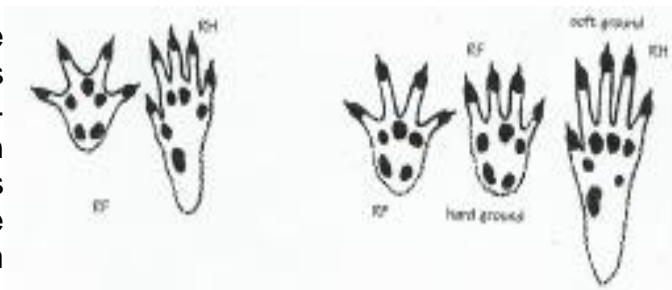


## Footprints

It is very difficult to tell the difference between water vole and rat footprints, as they both have the same ‘star’ shaped 4 toed foot at the front. Rat prints are often bigger though, and the angle of the toes is less sharp. You may also be able to see the “drag” line made by the rat’s tail between footprints.

Water Vole

Rat





### **Burrows**

Water vole burrows are the shape of a squashed tennis ball and about 4-8cm across. They usually have a number of holes including some above the water, some below the water, and some 'escape' holes as far as 3 metres back into the bank.



### **Vegetation piles**

Water voles sit on their haunches to eat and leave little piles of cut vegetation about 6 - 10cm long and cut at about a 45° angle as stockpiles for later.



### **Runs**

If you look closely enough down at a water vole level on the ground you can see their water vole shaped runways in amongst the plants. Often if you follow these runs they will lead you to more obvious signs.



### **Aerial nests**

When water levels are high or there is population pressure on burrows in summer, water voles will create above ground nests out of long grass and sedge. These will be suspended above ground.



### **Stoppered burrows**

Water voles will stopper their burrows with mud and vegetation. It may be to prevent water ingress and to keep the temperature higher during the winter.





# 13. Main threats to water voles



### Habitat destruction

i.e. machine clearance of vegetation or dredging of ditches – water vole territories are small and whole colonies can be wiped out in small areas.

### Piling



The banks of a canal have been reinforced with steel sheet piling leaving no soil for water voles to burrow into.



### Dereliction

When ditches are not managed or looked after they may dry out, scrub over or silt up. They need to be actively looked after.

### Rat poison

Water voles are often poisoned because they are mistaken for rats.



### Flooding

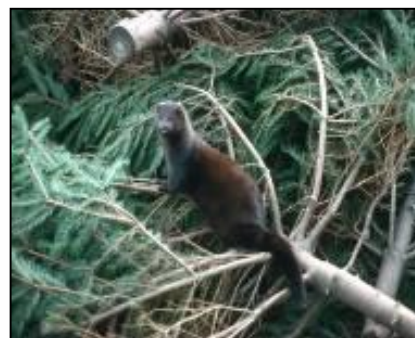


Frequent changes in water level can be exacerbated by land drainage.

Flooding can drown water voles in their burrows or flush them out, exposing them to predators and the elements and weather.

### American mink

Lack of habitat makes water voles vulnerable to mink, which are the only animals that can follow a water vole down its burrow and thus wipe out a whole family or hibernating group.



### Land drainage



Many wetlands are drained for agriculture, which removes wetland habitat for water voles and other wildlife.

### Trampling

Intensive stock farming of waterside areas often results in trampling of riverbanks. Water vole burrows cannot survive the impact or the vegetation cleared by grazing.



**Recreational Disturbance** - Although this is not a main threat it is an increasing one with dogs off leads able to access water and chase after water voles. The casual discarding of litter, and dog's faeces left on ditch banks, both start to degrade the habitat. Water voles can be resistant to noise and human movement if they become accustomed to it but need excellent habitat in which to hide and feel safe.



# 14. Habitat management

## Good habitat

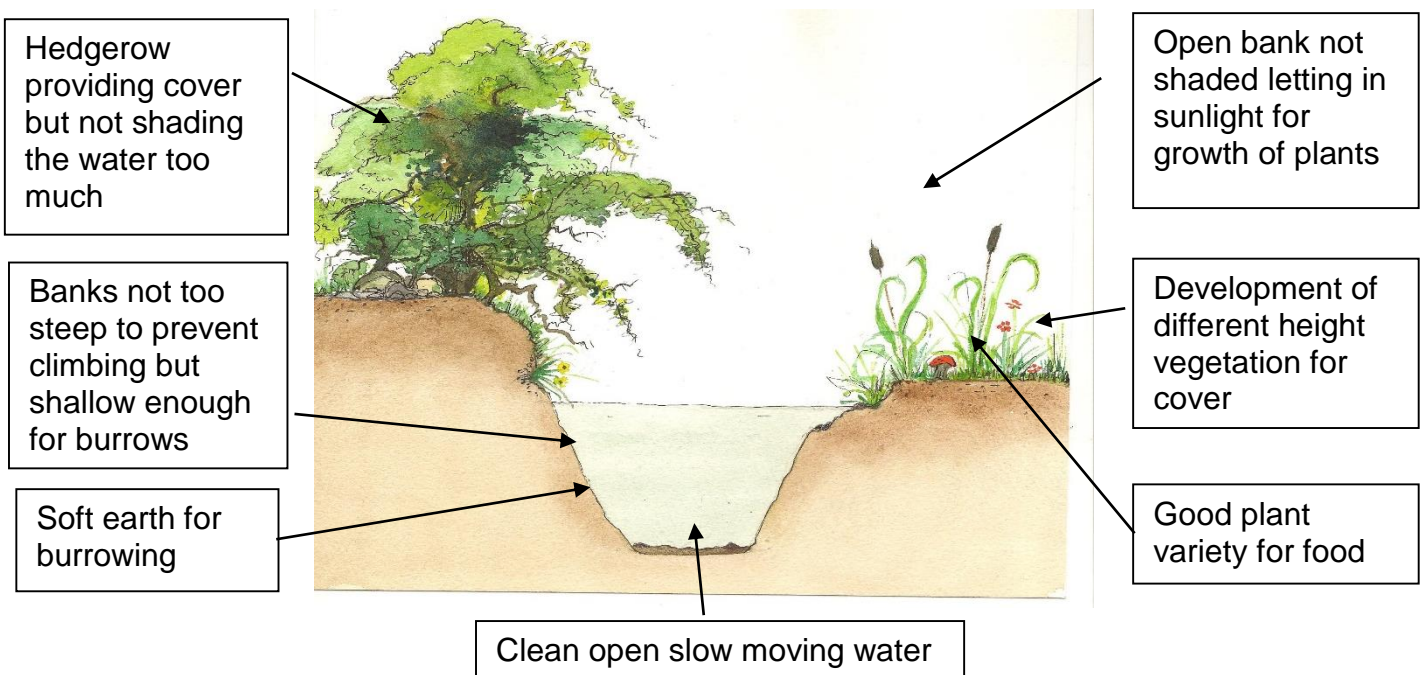


Chichester Golf Course

Good habitat for water voles requires some management as natural succession can change the vegetarian structure over time and make it less suitable. Water voles specifically need:

- lots of lush green vegetation throughout the year
- slow moving water
- no large changes in water levels.
- the banks need to be made of soft earth
- the top of the bank should contain vegetation that makes up good habitat of 6 metres creating a wide margin along the length of the waterway.

### Ideal water vole habitat ditch profile



Ditches with this profile also provide excellent habitat for many other hedgerow and wetland species such as kingfishers, dragonflies and water shrews.



## Vegetation

Plants provide water voles with their food and shelter. Water voles need a large variety of vegetation to get them through the year as they do not hibernate. An ideal habitat should have aquatic, marginal and bankside vegetation that peaks at different times of the year. Some bramble and trees will help to sustain water voles through the winter but they should not dominate the site. Plant material that has died and fallen over gives water voles cover from predators as they create tunnels and runs under the material to move about unseen.



## Wildlife



Wildlife can be improved by introducing more plant species and this can be achieved using pre-planted coir rolls. These can be held against the banks by stakes hammered into the ground and will quickly thrive. The coir rolls themselves can be burrowed into by water voles and are often used as mitigation technique by engineers where canalisation is taking place in a waterway in water vole habitat.

## Stock control



If cows can get to the waterways/wetlands they can damage the banks as they put extra weight on the soils which can, in turn, lead to water vole burrows being crushed. Cattle should only be allowed restricted access to the ditches and rifes so that these effects are minimised and kept to a small area or eradicated altogether.



### Opening up banks

Removing overhanging tree branches and invasive willow permits light onto banks and more plants can then grow up providing shelter. Bramble that is controlled and which doesn't bridge the water is a good food source for water voles all year round.



### Water levels

Consistent levels of water in ditches and ponds is important for water voles as it is a key part of their predator avoidance strategy. Once ditches and ponds dry out water voles are vulnerable to predators getting into their burrows and killing young. The use of bunds (small dams) to hold back water is a technique that keeps water in ponds and ditches for longer without causing flooding. They allow water to flow over them during periods of high rainfall and flow but keep water back during drier months.





## Mink control



The American Mink, *Neovison vison*, is an alien invasive species that was brought over at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century for fur farms but some individuals escaped or were deliberately released in the 1950s and 60s. Their impact on native species such as ground nesting birds and water voles has been devastating. Water voles have no natural defences against this aggressive and adaptable predator. Mink devastate populations by getting into the water voles' burrows. In order for water voles to thrive, a very committed and thorough mink control operation must be in place. Mink rafts must be deployed over a wide area to track mink and then traps put out to catch them before they start breeding

Mink rafts contain clay filled baskets to capture footprints of passing animals. Mink find these rafts very attractive and will climb on to explore them. In doing so they leave behind footprints on a hidden clay pad and often spraint (faeces). Water voles also like to sit on these rafts and use them as feeding and latrine sites so they are useful tools for monitoring their presence.





# 15. Other wetland species and habitats of interest

## Native Species

Work to improve habitat for water voles will increase biodiversity and be of benefit to other important species, and they include:

### Mammals

European Otter

Water Shrew

### Amphibians

Toads

Frogs

Newts – Smooth, Palmate and Great Crested

### Ground nesting birds

Snipe

Lapwing

### wetland birds

Kingfisher

Moorhen/coot/ducks

Grey Heron

Little Egret

### Aquatic Species

Crayfish (native)

### Dragonflies and Damselflies

**Bats** follow streams and ditches when foraging for food. These are all European Protected Species and can make use of trees or buildings as roost sites.



European Otter



Parrots Feather

## Alien Invasive Wetland Species

An eye must also be kept out for alien invasive species that will have a detrimental effect on native wetland habitats:

### Plants

- Himalayan balsam
- Parrots Feather
- New Zealand Swamp Cress
- Floating Pennywort
- Giant Hogweed
- Yellow fringed Water Lily
- Water Fern
- Japanese Knotweed

### Animals

- Mink
- Crayfish (non-native)

Some of these are Environment Agency (EA) notifiable species so if you see one, please record your location, take a photo, and go to the Natural England website where you can find advice about what to do next.

These websites will help you to identify an alien invasive species:

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wildlife-law-control-of-invasive-non-native-species>

## Other Habitats

There are different wetland habitats that are good for water voles and which benefit from their presence:

- **Wet Woodland Habitat** – Alders and Willows grow in wetlands and form carr woodland in some parts of the country.
- **Reedbeds** – the Common Reed is the UK's largest grass and forms stands where freshwater meets saline water – areas such as those at the back of Chichester and Pagham Harbours – supporting populations of Reed and Sedge Warblers, and Reed Buntings.
- **Open Wetlands** – such as ditches, ponds, canal, streams and brooks.
- **Reservoirs and Gravel Pits**
- **Floodplain Grasslands** – wet meadows / grazing marsh / rushy meadows
- **Saline Lagoons** – of the 35 lagoons in Sussex probably only 3 are considered of natural origin including Pagham Lagoon to the east of Pagham Harbour and The Severals to the west of the Reserve.



Saline lagoons



Woodland carrs



Canals



Floodplain grasslands



## 16. The way forward – a future for water voles

The MP supports a regionally important population of water voles. Ensuring their long term survival in our waterways cannot be left to chance and by carrying out active conservation work, water voles have the resilience to endure in our environment. Water voles need good habitat, no mink and a linked up network of permanently wet ditches, ponds, and rifes to allow them to travel around on the Manhood Peninsula. Under these circumstances they will thrive and multiply and fill an important role in the ecosystem.

### What activities can help water vole survival?

#### Water vole surveying and monitoring



Surveying informs landowners and ecologists where water voles are living and which sites need managing. Annual surveys build up a picture of their movement and monitor fluctuating environmental conditions such as flood or drought. The survey itself involves looking for water vole field signs. This is non-invasive to water voles and therefore is permitted under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. Surveying can be carried out by trained volunteers and the information is input into the Biodiversity Records Centre. Trapping water voles, taking DNA samples and micro chipping individuals is more invasive and can only be done with a license from Natural England. The data from this type of work however, does provide information about genetic inbreeding, dispersal ranges and territory sizes.

#### Working with landowners



Talking to and advising landowners how to manage their water ways, is an important action as it just takes one unknowing and unsympathetic action to render a site uninhabitable, possibly breaking a link in the connected network.

Carrying out surveys with landowner permission is the start, followed by suggesting habitat improvements and guidance on the time of year to carry it out. Volunteers can often carry out some work clearing bramble and cutting back willow but qualified tree surgeons and heavy vehicles may be required for larger scale work.

#### Managing habitat



Water vole habitat requires active management to ensure that it does not scrub over or dry out. This will need to be carried out carefully where water voles are in residence and, in the winter, when water voles spend more time under the ground. Where water voles are absent the waterways may be more enthusiastically improved with the aim of encouraging water voles to move in the following spring.

Management can take the form of litter and debris removal, cutting back bramble and willow and the introduction of other native plant species through the use of pre-planted coir rolls. More radical work may be required to remove large trees or improve banks by re-profiling.



**Ensuring links across the wider area**



Mapping the presence of water voles using GIS is a useful tool to see how the water vole population is connected across the wider area. This can then be used, with ditch assessment information to target and prioritise management to prevent water vole colonies being isolated.

Genetic information from trapping projects and hair tubing can be used to look at dispersal routes and relationships between colonies that make up the wider water vole population.

**Education**



A programme of education across the area is very important to inform children in schools how special water voles are and what we need to do to keep them. The children receive water vole leaflets and activities to reinforce what they have learned.

Talks given to local parishes, training events and workshops make up the adult education and informative literature created is disseminated to landowners and other interested parties.

The Water Vole Patrol has been created to encourage local involvement in water vole centred activities. It is made up of volunteers who carry out regular surveys and maintenance work on habitat sites. To get involved contact the MWHG and email [watervoles@mwhg.org.uk](mailto:watervoles@mwhg.org.uk)

**American Mink monitoring**



Any successful water vole conservation programme needs mink monitoring at the heart of it as habitat improvement work may well be negated by the presence of mink. Removing this tenacious predator allows water vole colonies to develop as well as benefitting other aquatic species and ground nesting birds.

Mink rafts are placed across the area on a range of waterways and monitored weekly to ensure that mink are controlled. Footprints on the clay insert are then identified. These rafts are often used by water voles too.

**Working with conservation agencies**



The MWHG works with the Environment Agency (EA) (the lead agency for water vole conservation), the RSPB (who manage 2 sites across the Manhood Peninsula), the Chichester Harbour Conservancy and The Sussex Wildlife Trust to ensure that there is no replication of effort, that all parties are working together for the same end and that all information is shared. The results are a trained and skilled group of volunteers on the ground, and a Water Vole Project Officer, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, who coordinate work and are the first point of contact for water vole issues.

**With the above in place, water voles should have a chance of survival and the opportunity to spread across the peninsula and into the wider area.**



# 17. Further information and contacts

## The Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group (MWHG)

The MWHG cares a variety of habitats across the Manhood Peninsula where wildlife can flourish. Some sites may be home to rare species, others form a network of rich and diverse habitats, which are managed by local volunteers of all ages and abilities.

The volunteers take part in fieldwork, conservation projects, the development of the initiatives to combat climate change, all helping to safeguard the unique qualities of the Manhood Peninsula. The work of the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group has been acknowledged with many awards:

- The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service 2010. This is the equivalent of an MBE for volunteer groups and is a unique National Honour conferred by the Queen.
- Winners of The National Green Apple Award for Conservation 2006 for the best conservation project.
- Repeated winners of the South and South East in Bloom Awards
- Repeated winners of the Green Flag/Green Pennant Awards

The Action Plan for Water Voles on the Manhood Peninsula from 2011 – 2020, authored by the MWHG, includes all the actions discussed in the previous section and are carried out by the group with a view to guaranteeing the long term future of the water vole population.

## Getting involved in active conservation work

If you are interested in conservation work and would like the opportunity to work with other local groups then please contact the Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group (MWHG) or the Sussex Wildlife Trust (SWT).

If you see any signs of otters or water voles and you have a camera then please take one photo of the signs and one of where you saw them if possible, and make a note of the place and date seen.

It is as important, if not more important, to survey those areas where there are no current records. By doing this we can establish whether otters and water voles are returning to these areas following conservation work etc. So don't be too disappointed if you don't find anything!

## Useful contacts and information

If you have access to the internet you may be interested in the following:-

- The Manhood Wildlife and Heritage Group website can be found at [www.mwhg.org.uk](http://www.mwhg.org.uk)
- Sussex Wildlife Trust website can be found at [www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk)

The Sussex Wildlife Trust operates a Wildcall Wildlife advice line for any enquiries regarding the identification of wildlife, planning queries, habitat and garden management etc. Call 01273 494777

The Field Studies Council produce useful, waterproof field guides to British mammals, wetland plants, British plants etc. These can be obtained at around £3 each 01743 850370

If you see any pollution incidents or dead otters please call the EA on 01903 703851

Local police phone line 0845 60 70 999 to report wildlife crime.