

WATER VOLES

(*Arvicola amphibius*) on the Manhood Peninsula



ECOLOGY AND BEHAVIOUR

Water voles live in burrows on the banks of waterways and hide in the long vegetation from their many predators. They are active all through the day and year round but are shy and not often seen.

Water voles are fast breeders with females giving birth from March with multiple litters of up to 6 pups through the spring and summer. The young are born helpless and hairless but leave the burrow after approx. 21 days when the next litter arrives.

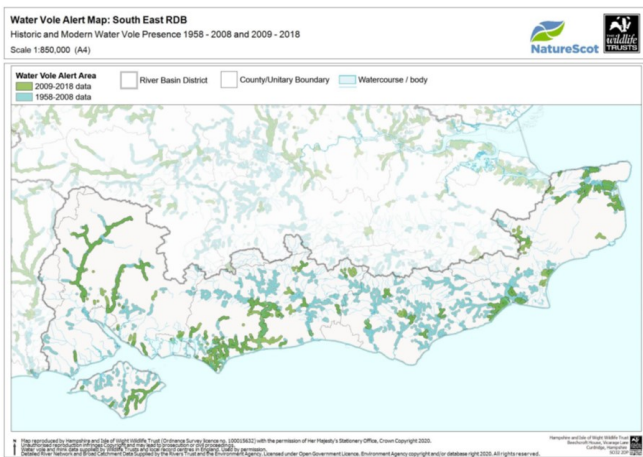
Water voles are very territorial and will fight with neighbours to defend their home and area of bank.

HABITAT AND DIET

Water voles live in the linked network of waterways of the Manhood Peninsula which is made up of mainly ditches and includes rifees, ponds, the Chichester canal and the reedbeds at the harbours.

Water voles like slow flowing clean freshwater with thick vegetation made up of many wild-flower species on the banks and soft earth for burrowing and creating their homes.

227 species of plants have been found in their diet and they need to eat a lot every day.



RANGE AND STATUS

The Manhood Peninsula has been a stronghold for water voles for many decades as the connected waterways allow this small mammal to move around. There are other colonies to the east at Arundel and to the West along the Ems. Keeping these colonies connected is a priority for genetic survival.

Nationally water voles are declining and are regarded as **Endangered** in England.

THREATS

Habitat destruction, a lack of sympathetic management and the introduction of American mink have had a devastating impact on water vole populations locally and nationally.

Habitat destruction



American Mink

(*Arvicola amphibius*) on the Manhood Peninsula

WATER VOLE FACTS AND FIGURES

Size: body 14 - 22 cm, tail 9.5 - 14 cm, the largest UK small mammal & most threatened

Weight: 150 - 300 g

Life Span: 5 months on average, up to 2 years in captivity

Colour: in England a chestnut brown, in Scotland they are black



DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WATER VOLES AND RATS

Nose: Water voles have blunt brown furry noses while rats have pointy pinker ones.

Tail: Water voles have brown furry tails while rats have hairless pinker ones.

Ears: Water voles have hidden fluffy ears with rats have large pinky ears that stick out.

Swimming: Water voles do a doggy paddle bobbing on the top of the water and rats swing their hips and tail.



WATER VOLE FIELD SIGNS - what to look for when looking for water voles



Latrines – piles of tic-tac sized and shaped odourless water vole poo that water voles deposited in piles at key sites as territorial markers. They are often on litter and raised areas on the banks to make them more obvious.

Burrows – the entrances to the water voles' home system of underground tunnels with some underwater exits.



Feeding piles (stations) and cut ends - water voles create piles of food when they find something really good to eat. They cut up the plant and leave it in handy snack sized piles that they come back to. They also often put a latrine in top to tell other water voles to keep away.

Water voles leave 45° degree cut ends on plant stems when they use their strong orange, iron coated front teeth, to bite through the vegetation. In winter, when plants are scarce, water voles eat the roots and rhizomes of bankside plants such as irises, and the bark of trees near the water like willow.