

SPECIES ACTION PLAN FOR WATER VOLE

*Lead Agency: Environment Agency
Trentside Offices
Scarrington Road
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 5FA*

Most recent update: May 1998

Current Status

The water vole is found throughout Britain, on densely vegetated banks of rivers, streams, canals and standing water. However, it has declined significantly in numbers and distribution this century. A national survey in 1989-90 failed to find voles in 67% of sites where they were previously recorded, and it is envisaged that this will continue to rise.

Recent water vole records for Nottinghamshire are scarce, and although the County has probably suffered similar declines to the rest of the UK, the extent of the current population is unknown. Rufford Lake and Clumber Park are known to support healthy local populations, and the national survey reports a good distribution along the middle Trent and its tributaries. A survey of Nottingham in 1994 indicated a healthy city population, and there are isolated records of sightings in other areas of the County. A more detailed survey is needed before an accurate assessment can be made.

Threats

The main factors currently affecting the water vole in Nottinghamshire are:

- Loss and fragmentation of suitable riparian (riverside) habitat.
- Disturbance of riparian habitats by human recreational activities (particularly angling and boating).
- Predation by mink and domestic cats.
- Pollution of watercourses (this has reduced in recent years, although accidental pollution still causes problems).
- Poisoning by rodenticides used to control the brown rat.

Current Initiatives - Examples

- A national Species Action Plan for the water vole has been prepared.
- The Wildlife Trusts are undertaking a national survey of water voles and their habitat.
- Many private landowners manage areas of actual or potential value for water voles. They have an important role to play in the implementation of this plan.
- The objectives of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for Watersides allow for the creation of habitats suitable for water voles.
- The British Waterways Environmental Code of Practice ensures that the needs of water voles are taken into account during the planning of bank protection and other channel works.

Targets

To contribute to the UK Species Action Plan by:

- *Ensuring that water voles are present throughout their 1970s range by 2010, considering habitat management and possible translocation of populations to areas from which they have been lost.*
- *Maintaining the current distribution and abundance of the water vole in Nottinghamshire.*

Proposed Action

Policy and Legislation

1) Following further research to identify the ecological requirements of this species, seek to ensure that these are taken into account when setting water quality objectives for standing and running waters occupied by water voles.

Action: Environment Agency (EA).

2) Promote management of riparian habitats to favour the water vole.

Action: EA, Biodiversity Action Group (BAG), Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA), Sherwood Forest Trust (SFT).

3) Ensure that the MAFF 'Code of Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Water' is published widely. MAFF to pursue poisonings under the Food and Environmental Protection Act 1998 and associated regulations.

Action: Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food (MAFF), Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), EA.

Site Safeguard and Management

4) Seek to include the needs of water voles in the management of SSSIs and other wildlife sites.

Action: English Nature (EN), Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust (NWT), Local Authorities (LAs), British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV).

5) Ensure that the protection and enhancement of water vole populations is highlighted and promoted in all Local Environment Agency Plans (LEAPs) by 2005.

Action: EA.

6) Explore the possibilities for creating areas of suitable habitat under the Countryside Stewardship Scheme.

Action: MAFF, FRCA.

7) Avoid damage to actual or potential water vole habitat caused by culverting, channelisation, sheet piling and flood defence work wherever possible, and explore opportunities for restoring watercourses to a more natural structure.

Action: EA, LAs, British Waterways (BW).

8) Promote the benefits of watercourse buffer strips to landowners and managers, including their value as water vole habitat.

Action: FWAG, EN, EA, NWT, BTCV, SFT, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB).

Species Management and Protection

9) Following further investigation on the effects of mink predation, and if deemed to be appropriate, encourage control of mink where this will increase water vole abundance or range.

Action: MAFF, FWAG, BW, LAs.

Advisory

10) Ensure the provision of advice to relevant organisations and riparian owners on the conservation problems of the species.

Action: LAs, EN, EA, FWAG, NWT, BTCV, SFT.

Future Research and Monitoring

11) Continue to survey to determine the distribution of water voles in Nottinghamshire, identifying key populations, and explore the need for localised reintroductions.

Action: EA, EN, NWT, Notts Biological and Geological Records Centre.

12) Pass information gathered during the survey and monitoring of the species to JNCC, BRC and RSNC so that it can be incorporated into a national database.

Action: EA, EN, NWT.

Communications and Publicity

13) Raise awareness and improve understanding of the water vole as an indicator species of the quality of riparian habitats.

Action: BAG, SFT.

What You Can Do

- Never pour used engine oil, paint or other chemicals down the drain. They will often end up in watercourses and pollute the water vole's habitat. Contact your district council for details of your nearest disposal point.
- Take part in organised water vole surveys.