

Essex Mink and Water Vole Project 2019

“ The initial gains we made in controlling mink appear to have stalled... so we need to take immediate action ”

a further 30% contraction in water vole distribution across England and Wales. The report highlights just how important local and regional action is to save this once common species.

Unfortunately the initial gains we made in controlling mink (a major cause of water vole decline) appear to have stalled. Even in well monitored rivers like the River Colne we have seen an unwelcome return of mink, possibly breeding in lakes or tributaries, so we need to take immediate action.

Late February to April is the most dangerous time for our native wildlife, as female mink establish breeding territories along our waterways, hunting birds, fish and small mammals along about 2km of suitable habitat. July to October is when the young (typically 6-8 but anything up to 13 in a litter) disperse across the countryside. If we can prevent them from establishing themselves at these times (even with little monitoring for the rest of the year) it has been shown to make a significant impact on the breeding success of mink.

“ Removing one female in Feb-April can prevent a litter of 6-13 young in the autumn ”

How can you help us to move this project forward?

In 2019 the Essex Mink Database will be linked into a regional system that covers Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. For the first time in the UK we will be able to map the presence of mink and water vole across a whole region in real time. We can also track the progress of mink control and monitoring efforts, identify gaps in coverage and plan replacement of old mink rafts. But for this to work efficiently we need to get the old network back up and running.

Please do phone, text, email or write telling us:-

1. Do you need a new raft or require repairs to your existing one?
2. Have you seen/caught any mink in 2017-2018 - if so when and where?
3. Do you need any help with raft checking?

What assistance is available from Essex Wildlife Trust?

FREE TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT

Our water vole work is funded through the Water For Wildlife Project – a collaboration between Anglian Water, Essex & Suffolk Water, the Environment Agency and Essex Wildlife Trust. This enables us to offer advice, training and loan equipment such as monitoring rafts.

DO YOU WANT TO HELP BUT ARE SHORT ON TIME?

The next generation of remote trap sensors, that send a text and email once a trap is triggered, speed up the process of dealing with captures. This not only makes the process more humane, but negates the need to visit empty traps. We have a small number of units we can loan out and we can give free advice to anyone who wants to buy one of their own.

On some catchments we also have teams of volunteer river wardens who may be able to check your rafts for mink footprints then alert you when you need to set a trap. If you think this might help then please get in touch.

PROFESSIONAL TRAPPING PROJECT

Because of the situation on the River Colne we are organising a professional trapper to monitor rafts in the water vole release area. There was a big spike in mink sightings in 2018 and even though we were trapping, it appears that water voles have been impacted.



ESSEX

**CELEBRATING
60 YEARS**

National Water Vole Database and Mapping Project

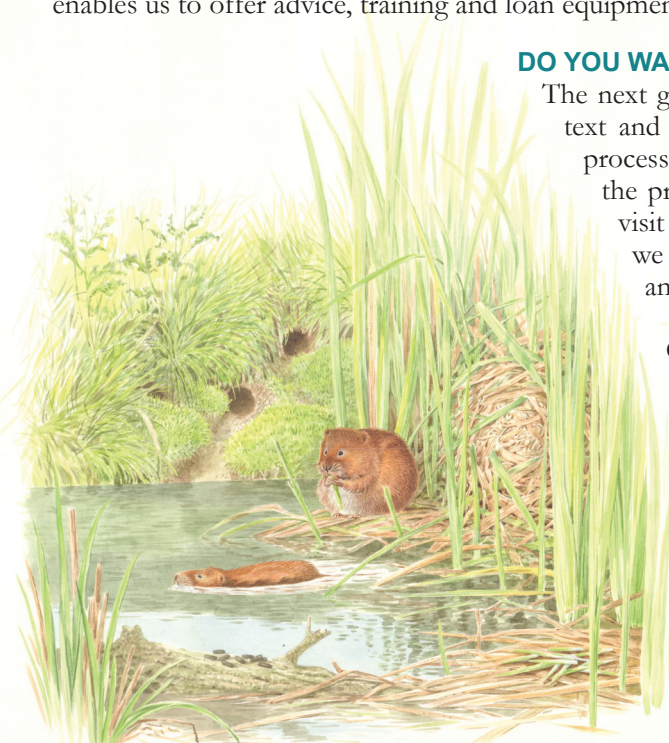
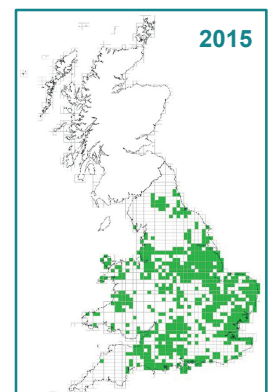
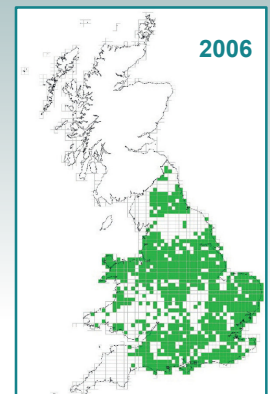
PART I: PROJECT REPORT 2006-2015

Catherine McGuire and Deborah Whitfield
December 2017



NO CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION

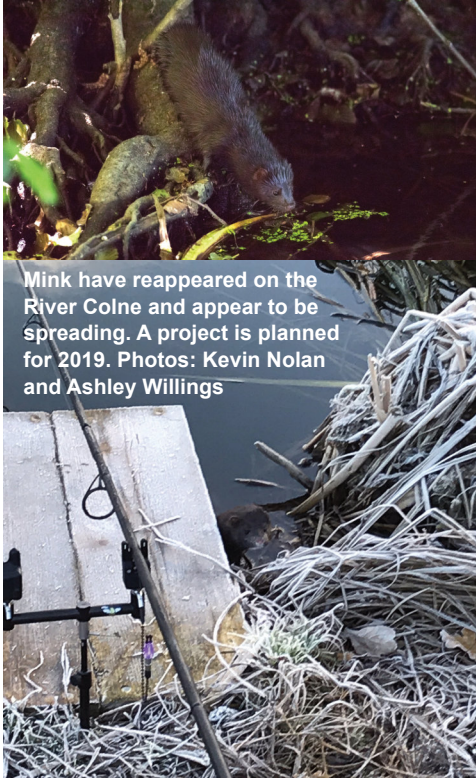
The distribution of water voles fell a further 30% between 2006 and 2015. (No data for Scotland).



RIGHT: MAPPING THE TRUE PICTURE USING THE ESSEX MINK DATABASE

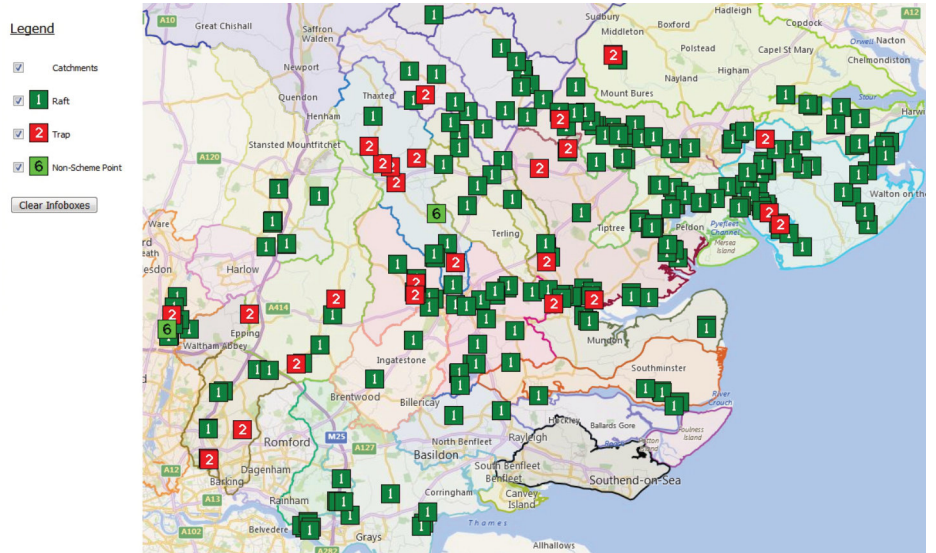
Mink monitoring rafts installed across Essex and still classed as active (Map 1) contrast starkly with actual records received from landowners and volunteers across the network in 2018 (Map 2).

Rafts may have fallen into disrepair but we still need records from active rafts even if no mink signs were found. Please let us know if you will be checking for mink in 2019 and tell us about any activity from 2017-2018.

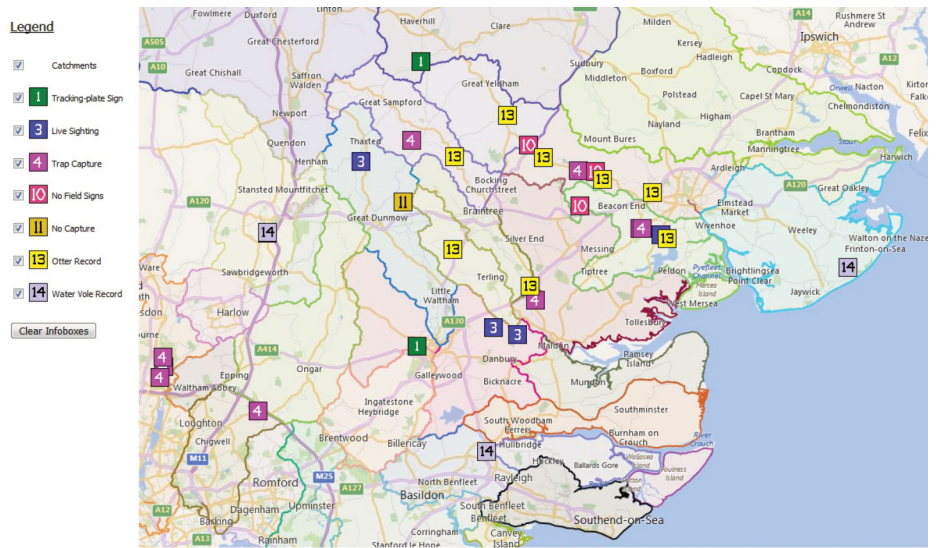


Mink have reappeared on the River Colne and appear to be spreading. A project is planned for 2019. Photos: Kevin Nolan and Ashley Willings

Map 1: Potentially active mink raft and trap locations 2018



Map 2: Actual activity reported from mink rafts in 2018



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Environment Agency

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RAFT RENEWAL

Does your raft look tired and unloved? Swap it for one of our new 'Eco Rafts' with sealed edges to prevent polystyrene eroding into the water and a handy hatch in the tunnel for easy access to the clay pad.



A big thank you to all the organisations, land managers, Volunteer River Wardens and landowners who have supported the project over the years.

Please remember that although it can seem that mink are gone, they travel long distances so can return unexpectedly. Even if you only check your rafts in March-April and August-October you can make a huge difference, so please keep checking. Together we can get this 'early warning' network back up to full strength.