



# NORFOLK MINK PROJECT

Annual Newsletter 2, January – December 2014



Norfolk  
Non-native  
Species  
Initiative



## 2014 STATISTICS

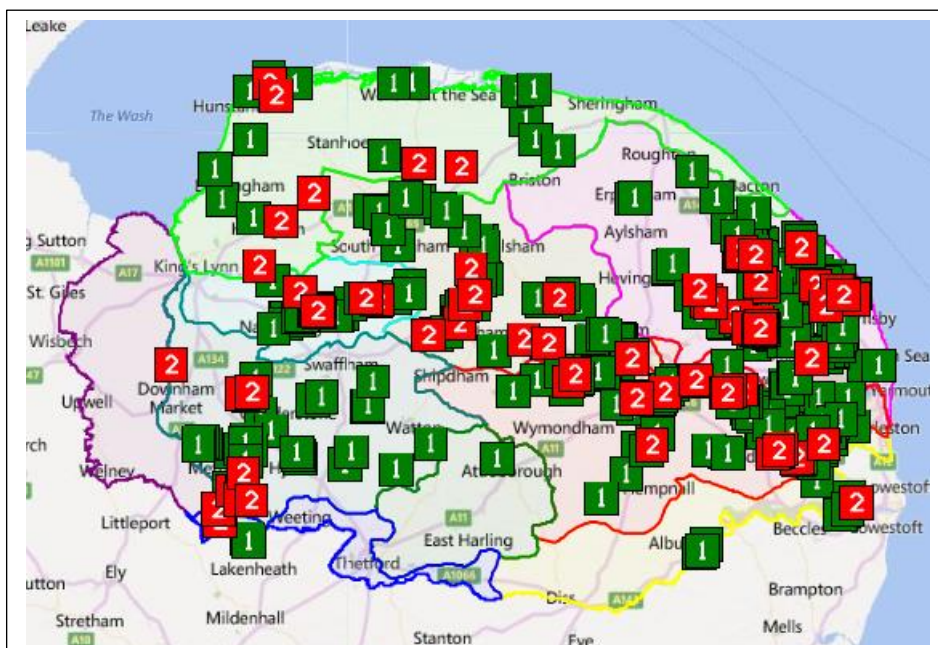
Total Mink Killed	99
Rafts Deployed	384
Traps on Loan	513
Volunteers Involved	268

### Thank you for helping to protect our wildlife

A huge thank you to all those who have been involved with trapping and monitoring over the past year. The Project is only possible because of your commitment and the financial support from our partners. There have been 268 volunteers actively involved and 99 mink captures known this year in Norfolk. This gives a total of at least 1000 mink that have been trapped since the Project began along the Wensum in 2003.

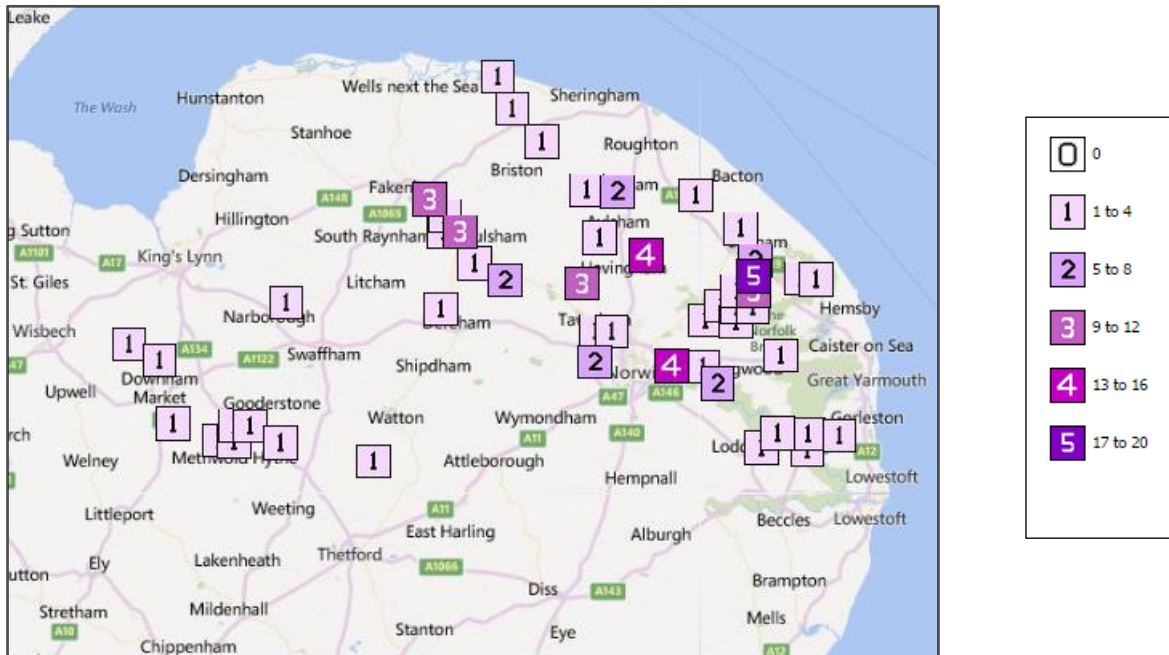
## TRAPPING SUMMARY

In the last Newsletter we mentioned that we were developing a new 'Cloud' database system to help us better monitor the Project. That is now up and running and the following two maps were produced from it. The first shows positions for all traps and rafts used during the Project and the outline of the 10 Catchments we use when managing and reporting. The positions shown in the North Norfolk Rivers Catchment and the Wissey and Cut-Off Channel have all been established since 2012. However, the map also shows that we need to expand into the Great Ouse, the Thet and north bank of the Waveney. We had hoped to start some of this in 2014 but unfortunately this was delayed. Work is planned for all 3 Catchments in 2015.



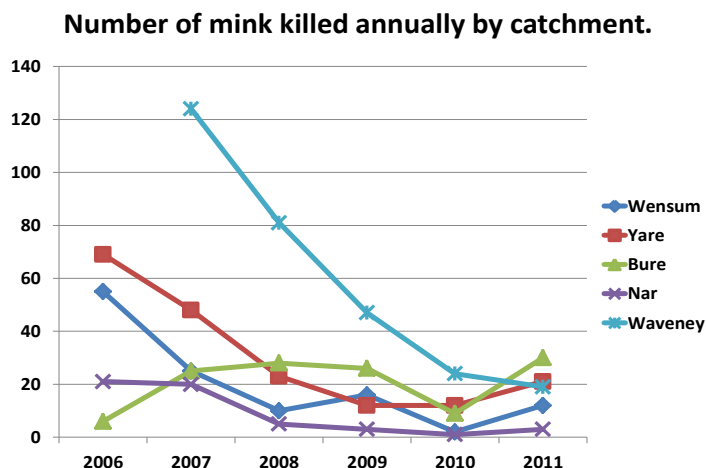
The second map shows the positions of all captures and other evidence of mink recorded in 2014. It indicates a greater density to the east of the county, with the Bure, Wensum and Yare around Norwich being of particular concern. Mink are also well established along the Wissey and Little Ouse and it will be interesting to see how many are trapped from the Great Ouse catchment when we do more trapping there this year. If you know of any mink from 2014 obviously missing from the map, please let your co-ordinator know.

**Number of mink 'events' (kills, sightings, field sign etc.) per tetrad (2 x 2 km<sup>2</sup>) in 2014.**



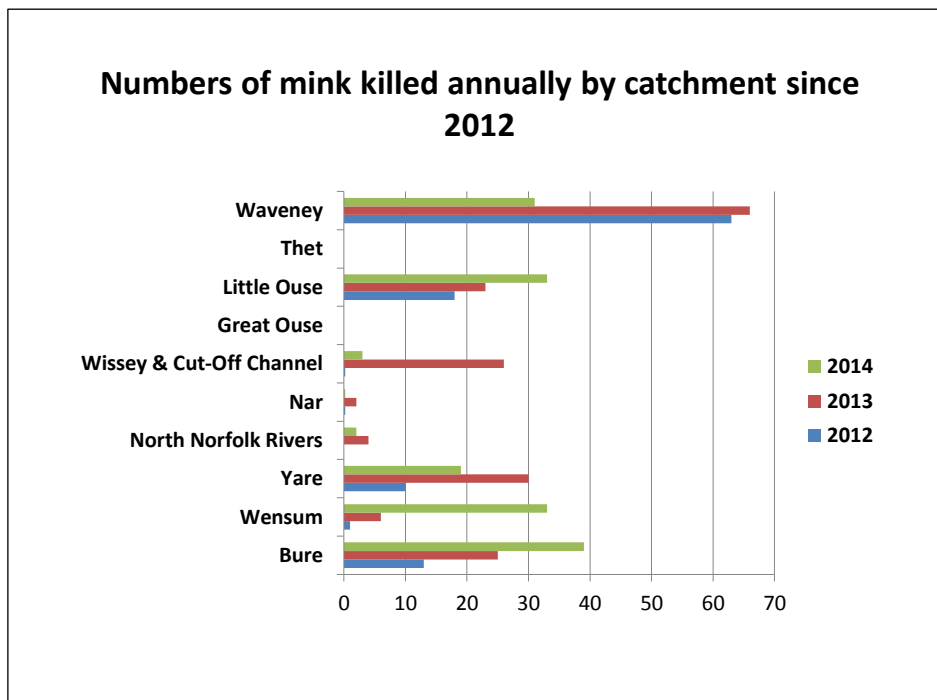
## Progress: 2006 - 2011

The graph below is a reminder of the good progress that has been made in those Catchments where we have been trapping for some years. Mink kills per year fell with a steady trapping effort. Results for the Waveney (and Little Ouse, see later) are largely the result of trapping co-ordinated by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust and cover the catchment on both sides of the county boundary.



## Progress: 2012 - 2014

The figure below shows progress over the past 3 years; numbers of mink killed rose in all catchments between 2012 and 2013. However, the picture for 2014 is more mixed, with kills increasing in the Bure and Wensum and generally falling elsewhere. Such changes are difficult to interpret and may have a variety of causes. The increases could be due to more effort going in, as has happened in the Bure, or perhaps an understandable response of reducing monitoring and trapping when numbers trapped are low, which is followed by the population bouncing back! Hopefully some of the falls are long term but time will show.



## CATCHMENT REPORTS

### BURE AND YARE

Stephen Mace

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#### MINK KILL & STATUS 2014

**Bure**

**39**



**Yare**

**19**



#### Bure

There were 39 mink caught in the Bure catchment in 2014, with a large number caught within a small area. That area was from Sutton Fen down to Catfield and across the river to Irstead but also included some sightings and a couple of captures at How Hill. There were 21 mink caught within this area over the year between four volunteers. The mink seemed to have been coming into this area from the north, where I expect some young were born between Barton Broad and Wayford Bridge, possibly as far as East Ruston. Another area that saw a few mink early in the year was Buxton Mill where I used a Mink Police unit which the project had on trial at the time; this produced some good results that can be read in Haydn Claridge's story below. The Bure catchment does have some good coverage now but there are still some areas that have gaps; north and west of Aylsham is an area that could do with a little more coverage still. If you know anyone that might be interested in joining the project please contact me.

## Yare

We had a total of 19 mink caught within the Yare catchment in 2014. We have had quite a few signs of mink from Thorpe down to Strumpshaw and across to Surlingham which has led to several captures in this area but there still seem to be a mink presence here. I have taken on a few more volunteers within this area which has established better coverage. We are looking for people to monitor rafts anywhere within the Yare catchment but especially anywhere from Loddon to Hingham and down to Long Stratton so please contact us if you know anyone who might be interested.

A few mink were caught on the upper Yare early in the year during the mating season. Since then it's been very quiet, with only one detected and subsequently caught.

## Norfolk bank of the Waveney

Three mink were caught in total in the Waveney catchment on the Norfolk side; they were all between Fritton and Bradwell. The Norfolk part of the Waveney catchment was not an area we were able to do much work in until recently, although we do have a few volunteers there. We therefore know relatively little about the mink population but given the large numbers caught on the Suffolk side in the past it is safe to assume they are about. With support from the local IDB we are now starting work there and I will be looking for people that might be interested in joining, so if you know anyone from Bradwell to Diss who might be keen please contact us.

## NORTH NORFOLK RIVERS

Rory Hart

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### MINK KILL & STATUS 2014

North Norfolk

2



It has been quiet over most of the area, with two exceptions. In September the corpse of a mink was found washed up at Blakeney Point, although its origin is unknown. Another mink was caught in October, on the outside of a release pen, close to the river Glaven, near Holt. This followed a sighting earlier in the year further downstream. A further mink was trapped along the Glaven near Holt in January 2015 so this river seems very much a focus for mink in North Norfolk. With vigilance it should be possible to keep these valuable chalk streams virtually free of mink and protect their wildlife but mink range widely and could pop up when least expected!

## WENSUM, NAR AND WISSEY

Paul Gambling

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### MINK KILL & STATUS 2014

Wensum 33



Nar 0



Wissey 3



Great Ouse 0 Unknown

## Wensum

The past year has seen a large increase in mink numbers compared with previous years but in patches rather than evenly along the river catchment. They have been found particularly from Pensthorpe to Guist and North Elmham to Bylaugh, and in the Attlebridge-Swannington area, with one or two individuals in between. There has been a steady but small trickle in the past, but this has increased noticeably this year. Part of the reason for this is that monitoring and trapping was started at new sites, but some existing sites have also seen a large increase in numbers. Many mink have been caught by trappers outside the project which we believe has helped greatly in protecting other reaches and we are very grateful for this and for the information. It is possible that mink are breeding in some of the areas not accessible to the project and expanding from there - a pattern which was seen on the upper River Yare until recently.

## Nar

Continued vigilance and an effective network of trappers and monitors, particularly around West Acre, has kept the upper Nar almost mink free for another year. The local water vole population has now fully recovered from the disastrous effects of years of mink predation and is thriving, as too is the other wildlife along this beautiful river.

## Wissey

A few mink have been found and captured in small numbers on and around the main river, mainly on the lower reaches and particularly in the fens and dykes away from the lower part of river. There has been a slow but steady influx on the lower reaches, probably making their way in from the River Great Ouse, and which has been kept in check almost single-handedly by an assiduous and very effective trapper, many thanks John. The upper reaches above Bodney appear to be mink free at the moment and by blocking their potential progress upstream we hope to keep it that way. We have a limited number of trappers and monitors at present, so any extra help particularly monitoring for mink arriving in the middle to upper reaches and on the Cut-off Channel would be gratefully received.

## Great Ouse

Mink are known to be present in the lower Great Ouse catchment but little co-ordinated control has been possible until recently when funding was received from the King's Lynn IDB. A period of injury for the Co-ordinator, initial difficulty in finding sites and trappers and extensive public access to water courses presents different challenges from other areas for mink control and has meant a slow start to the project. However, with the groundwork now laid, enrolment is gathering momentum quickly and 2015 will see a significant increase in activity. Rory Hart will lead in this Catchment in 2015.

## WAVENEY AND LITTLE OUSE

**Penny Hemphill**

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### MINK KILL & STATUS 2013

**Waveney**

**31**



**Little Ouse**

**33**



Control of mink along most of the River Waveney and the Little Ouse is carried out by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust working in collaboration with the Norfolk Mink Project. As mink are no respecters of county boundaries close co-operation between neighbouring counties is essential and this section reports on mink trapped on both sides of the county boundary.

## Waveney

Current total for 2014 is 28 mink trapped in Suffolk and 3 in Norfolk. That is a significant drop in mink trapped compared to 2013 and 2014 showing a downward trend once more, which is good news. However, last year I tempted fate by saying the Waveney seemed mink free upstream of Harleston – three mink were then trapped in 2014 upstream of Harleston, at Billingford, so I will never say any river is mink free again! We have had recent reports of mink at Homersfield so have recruited a new trapper; also another report of mink at Bungay so the nearest trapper has been alerted and his traps are now active.

## Little Ouse

Trapping rates along this river has been up and down over the years and in 2014 33 mink were trapped. 18 of these were caught at the RSPB site at Lakenheath Fen on the county boundary. This demonstrates that in favourable habitats, without control, mink can reach a relatively high density, with consequent significant impact on native wildlife.

## A FOCUS ON TRAPPERS

The following is the story of one Project supporter, Haydn Claridge.

*I live near the River Bure down river from Buxton Mill. We live in a valley where there are many streams and dykes. When we moved here 30 years ago one of my lasting memories was hearing the 'plop' sound of a water vole slipping into the stream from the bank. More recently this relatively large water vole population has been reduced considerably.*

*I didn't realise what was happening to them until I heard about the activities of mink that have escaped from mink farms into the wild. A few years ago we had sightings of mink on the river banks and in the streams. I contacted the Norfolk Mink Project and was soon visited by Paul Gambling, the Mink Co-ordinator for my area. Stephen Mace later took over my area from Paul as the Project was growing across Norfolk. We also had a fishery bailiff, Ash Hurst who had successfully caught mink on our land but is no longer living in the area.*

*Stephen set up some traps on a peninsula of land between the river and the Lock cut. The number of mink caught in a short period was astounding. Five were caught between the 13th and 20th of March 2014 and one later on the 18th of July (Mill and surrounding area shown below).*

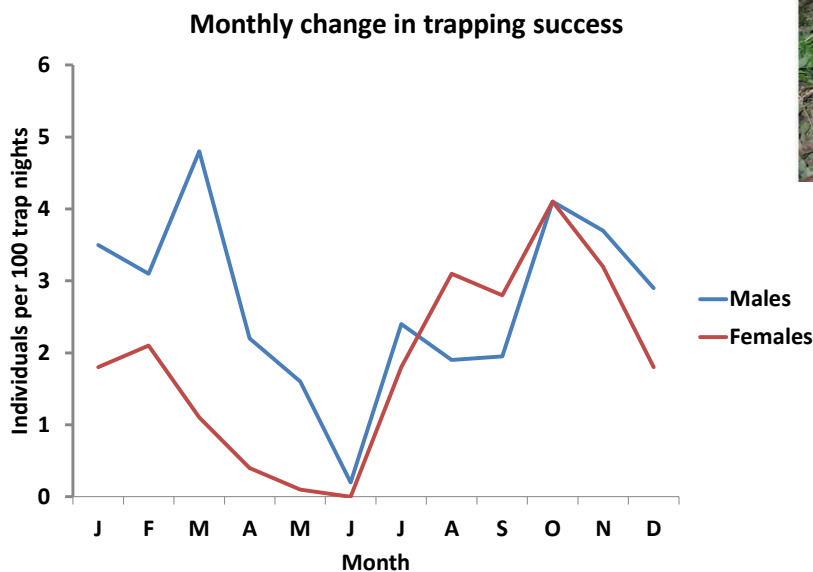
*Stephen was assisted by the use of a 'Mink Police' which is an electronic device which sends messages to his mobile phone. It saves the need for the traps to be inspected daily and informs Stephen when the trap has been activated.*

*I am hoping to see an increased population of water voles as a result of less mink living in our area and am very grateful for the support received from the Mink Project.*



## FLUCTUATIONS IN TRAPPING SUCCESS

We are sometimes asked if mink are more easily caught at one time of year than another. The simple answer is 'yes' and the figure below shows the relative trapping success during trapping operations. This was from one long term trapping study but the pattern holds good for our population as it is based on when mink are most mobile and therefore most likely to encounter a trap. Mink are most frequently caught in late summer, when juveniles predominate, and during the mating season, when there is a tendency to catch more adult males. Perhaps relax a bit in May and June but keep a sharp look out in the spring and autumn!



After: Ireland (1990). Ph.D. Thesis, University of Durham

## POLECATS

Polecats are returning to the eastern region and there have been several sightings/inadvertent trappings of polecats in Suffolk, in the Stour catchment. Then in November 2014 a true polecat was trapped in South Lopham at the source of the Waveney. There has also been one record from Norfolk, from just east of Attleborough. It is easy to confuse a true polecat with a polecat ferret and both animals are likely to enter mink traps. If this happens the advice is to release the animal although current legislation does not make it illegal to shoot them once accidentally trapped. However it is illegal to deliberately set a trap with the intention of catching a polecat.

The Vincent Wildlife Trust is carrying out a national polecat survey and would be very keen to hear from anyone who comes across a polecat or polecat ferret. More details can be found on their website: <http://www.vwt.org.uk/our-work/projects/national-polecat-survey> .



## AND FINALLY

We have recently had to say goodbye to our Project Leader Mike Sutton-Croft. He will be greatly missed by the Project but was tempted away by a good job in York. The County Council will be appointing a replacement and we currently have temporary arrangements in place.

We realise that many of you will have lived and probably worked by water for a long time and that your health and safety is your own responsibility. However, we feel as a Project we should do all we can to help you stay safe and will be including our latest Health and Safety Risk Assessment with this newsletter.

A very generous donation of £500 from a local high technology company, Westcotec, enabled the Project to purchase two Mink Police remote trap monitoring units. A further unit was kindly donated by Mr & Mrs Claridge. These allow traps to be set and monitored remotely without the need to visit them every day. The units send a text message twice a day relaying their status and an alert whenever the trap is triggered. This means that trappers can operate very efficiently and react immediately to captures, and the system allows trapping where it would not otherwise be possible. Managing director of Westcotec, Phil Hayton, himself a volunteer trapper, has trialled one of the units and has already captured mink using it. The value of the unit donated by the Claridges is highlighted in the section on trapping near Buxton Mill above. The units are regularly relocated to where they are most needed and have proved extremely successful; our grateful thanks to Phil, Haydn and Maggie. *If you are able to help by purchasing a unit for the Project please speak to your co-ordinator, who would be extremely grateful!*

Finally, a sincere thank you from all of us to our funders, supporters and those who carry out the trapping, for enabling us to protect water voles, wildlife and game interests across the county.

Simon Baker

Chair of the Steering Group and compiler of the Newsletter

