



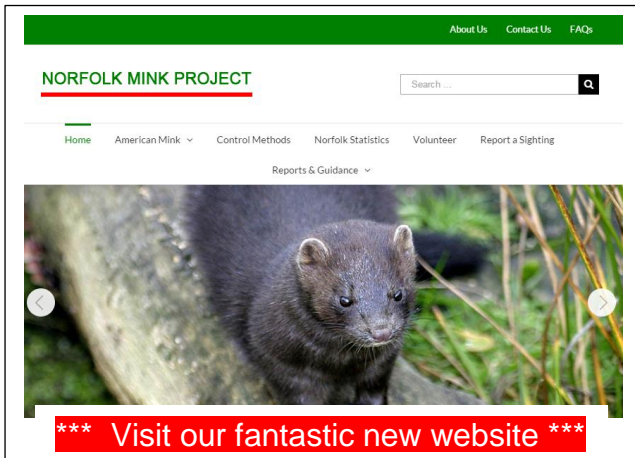
NORFOLK MINK PROJECT

Annual Newsletter 3, January – December 2015

*** New Website <http://thenorfolkproject.org.uk/> ***



**Norfolk
Non-native
Species
Initiative**

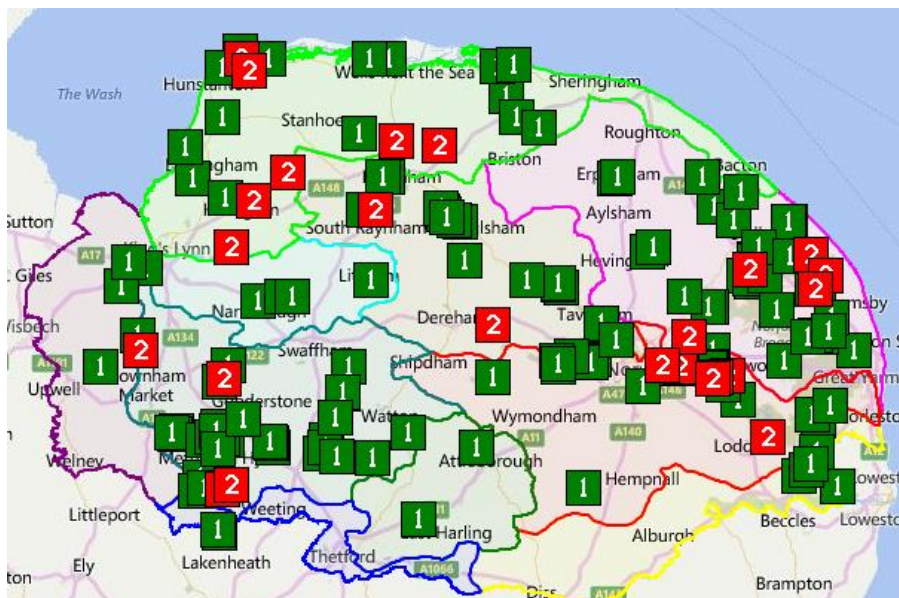


2015 STATISTICS	
Total Mink Caught	70
Rafts Deployed	395
Traps on Loan	538
Volunteers Involved	275

A huge thank you to all those who have been involved with trapping and monitoring over the past year. The number of mink taken is **30% down on last year**, which hopefully reflects a real decrease in the population so well done to everyone. However, a few missed breeding females and the population will soon increase again so please keep vigilant. As well as achieving good control the other major success this year is a fantastic new website developed by Stephen Mace – more detail of which later.

TRAPPING SUMMARY

The Project is continually developing with some raft / traps being removed and new ones added. To give an idea of the scale of this, the map below shows all the new positions that have been established over the past 3 years (2013 -2015). There was virtually no trapping in the North Norfolk Rivers and Wissey / Cut-Off Channel catchments before this and this year we have expanded the network into the Great Ouse, starting in the east of the catchment, and in the Lower Waveney. The one area where we had hoped to do more was along the Thet. Unfortunately we were unable to arrange that but the contract for a co-ordinator to start work in that area has now been drawn up and we will be looking for volunteers in that catchment during 2016.



New raft & trap positions 2013 - 2015



The second map shows the positions of all captures and other evidence of mink recorded in 2015. As last year, it shows 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, although we only started trapping in the Great Ouse late in the year, we did hear of 3 killed by a keeper so anticipate finding more as we do more trapping in this catchment. If you know of any mink from 2015 obviously missing from the map, please let your co-ordinator know.

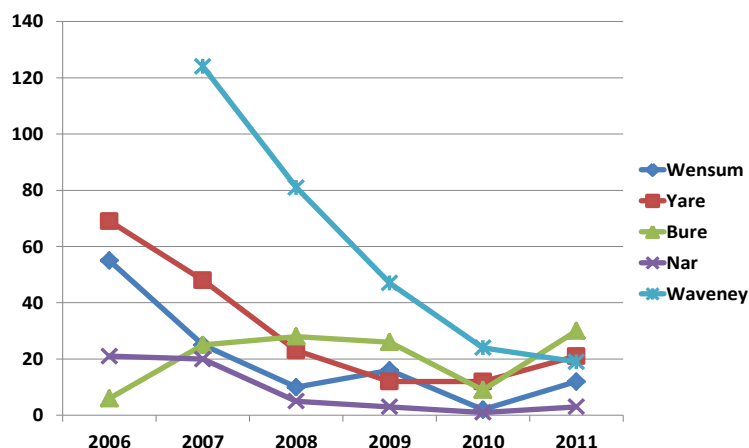
Number of mink 'events' (captures, sightings, field sign etc.) per tetrad (2 x 2 km²) in 2015.



Progress: 2006 - 2011

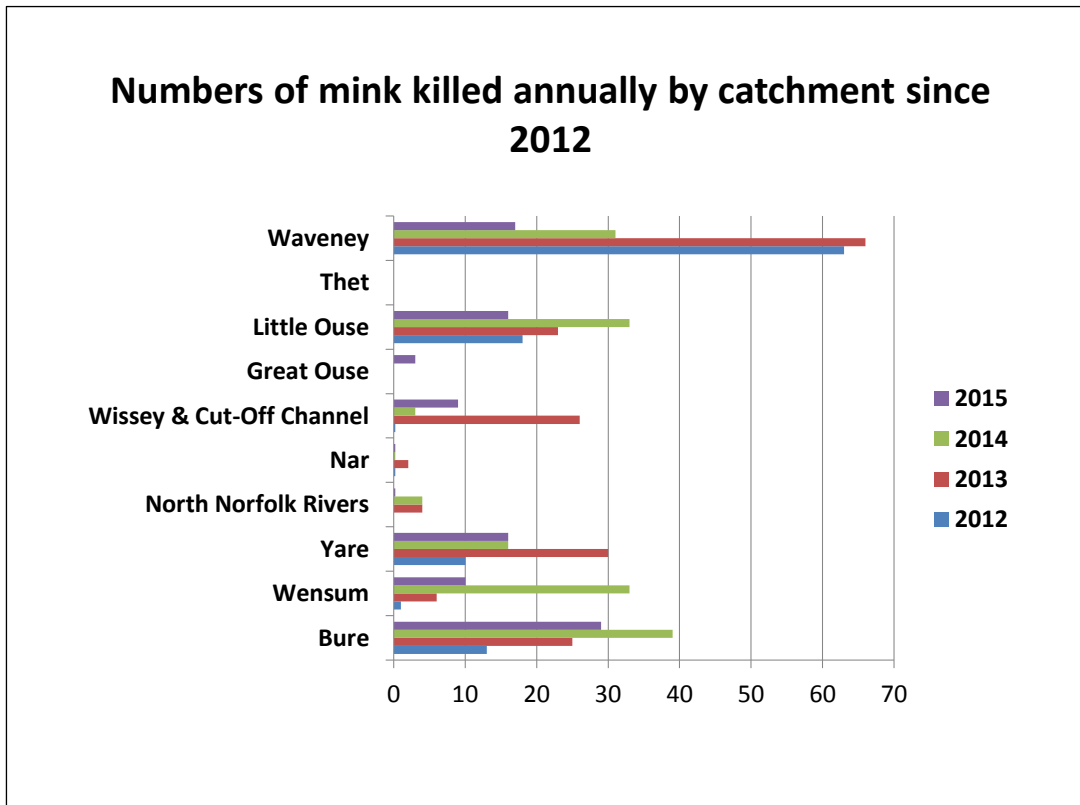
The graph below is a reminder of the good progress that has been made in those Catchments where we have been trapping for some years. Mink kills per year fell with a steady trapping effort. Results for the Waveney (and Little Ouse, see later) are largely the result of trapping co-ordinated by the Suffolk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

Number of mink killed annually by catchment.



Progress: 2012 - 2015

The figure below shows progress over the past 4 years; numbers of mink killed rose in all catchments between 2012 and 2013 with a more mixed picture in 2014. The results for 2015 indicate that mink continue to be very scarce along the Nar and in North Norfolk and are generally being effectively controlled across the rest of the county. Continued control could create further catchments that are effectively free of mink – it would be great to see that happen!



CATCHMENT REPORTS

BURE AND YARE

Stephen Mace

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MINK KILL & STATUS 2015

Bure	29	
Yare	16	

Bure

Twenty nine mink were caught in the Bure catchment in 2015 down from 39 in the previous year. There were 10 caught in the Salhouse and Ranworth area but on a whole the mink caught have been more spread out compared to 2014, where half the total number for the catchment were caught in a small area. Again the Mink Police unit at Buxton is proving its worth, with 4 more 'arrests' over the year and as a result the landowner has seen water voles return to this picturesque part of the river. The Bure catchment is running very smoothly and I would like to thank everyone involved, numbers are coming down slowly and, if we keep up the good work, hopefully the coming year will see a decrease in numbers again. Coverage is good but if you know of anyone that wants to join please me know, any gap could be crucial, NW Aylsham could do with some coverage.

Yare

In the Yare 16 were caught in 2015, the same number as in the previous year. However, all the activity has been along the main river between Reedham and Norwich. This area can be particularly tricky since the habitat leading into Norwich is ideal for mink. We knew of a mink family in this area a few years ago that was not caught. However, we now have more volunteers along this stretch of the river and, with some quick response times to sightings, mink were caught soon after. This stretch might continue to be a challenge with good habitat for breeding and difficult trapping locations due to public access, but in time with enough effort I am confident we can get on top of them. Coverage is decent along the main river, although Postwick is a small gap. Any further help along the main river leading into Norwich would be much appreciated.


Thet

We have a some limited funding to do work in the Thet catchment this year. We do not know much about this area in terms of mink population, if you know of anyone that might be willing to help the project in the Thet please let me know.

NORTH NORFOLK RIVERS

Rory Hart

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MINK KILL & STATUS 2015	North Norfolk	0	
	Great Ouse	3	

North Norfolk Rivers

The catchments remain quiet with encouraging reports from volunteers that no mink were sighted in 2015. Three were caught near a pheasant release pen on the Glaven last year but unfortunately, shortly after this success, the project equipment was stolen and so the location was lost to the project for the foreseeable future. On a more positive note, rafts lost or damaged in storms over the last winters have been repaired and replaced and are in service on the coast once again. Reports from volunteers are encouraging with no new sightings of live mink or reports of road kills etc. However, continued vigilance is of the highest priority as we have had experience before of rapid colonisation by mink after an apparent lull in activity. Other indicators of mink have also been pleasingly low; water vole, that are very vulnerable to mink, have survived the coastal surge and are reported as 'doing well' at Blakeney.

We hope to increase mink control work in the area during 2016, particularly moving up stream from the coastal locations and would welcome enquiries from land owners/managers interested in joining the project.

Great Ouse

In October 2015, the Norfolk mink project was able to expand the area in which co-ordinated mink control is carried out by developing the volunteer network into the Great Ouse catchment. There are now 8 locations where active trapping / monitoring is taking place. Mink caught incidentally during the coypu control work during the 1970s and 80s showed that there was a thriving population in the area with the potential to act as a source population that could colonise other locations. There are a large number of sites within the catchment that are of very high value to nature conservation that could be particularly vulnerable to mink predation. There is evidence that mink still remain, one volunteer has managed to catch 3 mink in one week around a single duck flight pond on his farm.




To date volunteers have been recruited from the outskirts of King's Lynn to Welney. Where necessary, project equipment has been provided either to supplement those where land managers are already actively applying predator control or to facilitate monitoring/trapping in favourable areas where there is enthusiasm to control mink but few resources available to do the work. **We are particularly interested to recruit more volunteers on sites where there are recent records for mink activity or where they have been seen in the environment.** We hope to increase our presence into the more urban areas of King's Lynn where there is a possibility that mink are under reported, where they are not included in existing pest control activity and there is considerable potentially suitable habitat for the species.

WENSUM, NAR AND WISSEY

Paul Gambling

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MINK KILL & STATUS 2015

Wensum	10	
Nar	0	
Wissey	9	

Wensum

The past year has seen a decrease in mink numbers detected and caught compared with last year. Their presence has been patchy rather than being evenly distributed along the river catchment. They have been detected at Sculthorpe and Pensthorpe to Guist, North Elmham, Lyng, Lenwade to Attlebridge, and in the Taverham to Costessey area, but none in between these areas or further downstream. There has been a steady but small trickle in the past, which increased noticeably in 2014 but has now decreased again. The monitoring and trapping started at new sites in 2014 has been successful in reducing mink numbers to previous levels. This year, three mink were caught at Pensthorpe, one near Guist, one at Gressenhall, two at North Elmham and the remaining three at Lenwade and Attlebridge. A third of those trapped were caught with the assistance of the Mink Police remote trap monitoring units funded by local company Westcotec last year through director Phil Hayton, to whom we send renewed thanks.

Nar

A network of keen and enthusiastic trappers and monitors, particularly around West Acre and Castle Acre, has kept the upper Nar apparently mink free for another year. This situation highlights just how effective continued long term monitoring can be, given that when the project began in 2006, water voles were to be found almost nowhere along the river. Today, the local water vole population is thriving, as too is the other wildlife along this beautiful river. Rory Hart will take over as Co-ordinator for this catchment in 2016.

Wissey

A few mink were detected on the lower and middle reaches of the river, particularly around Methwold, Didlington and STANTA, mainly in the fens and dykes away from the main river, with several being caught on the tributaries of Stringside Drain. Most mink which were detected were trapped successfully but a few appeared to be mink passing through the area and were not seen again. There appears to be a slow but steady influx on the lower reaches, probably making their way in from the River Great Ouse. The upper reaches of the river appear to be mink free at the moment and by blocking their potential progress upstream we hope to maintain this. 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, will be gratefully received.



WAVENEY AND LITTLE OUSE

Penny Hemphill

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&

Stephen Mace (Norfolk bank of Waveney)

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MINK KILL & STATUS 2015	Waveney	17	
	Little Ouse	16	

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 2015 is 14 mink trapped in Suffolk and 3 in Norfolk. That continues the decline noticed last year and mirrors what has been seen more generally over both Norfolk and Suffolk in 2015; a downward trend which is good news for our wildlife.

Of the 3 killed on the Norfolk bank, 2 were caught at Burgh St Peter and 1 was a road kill on the Haddiscoe Dam. A few more volunteers have joined the project in the Waveney since the last newsletter but I am still looking to add some more between Haddiscoe and Diss, if you or you know someone that might be interested please let me (Stephen) know.

Little Ouse

Only half the number of mink were caught in this catchment in 2015 compared to 2014. Numbers caught in this catchment have fluctuated considerably over the years so let's hope this is a decline that can be sustained.

FERAL FERRETS

In our last Newsletter we briefly looked at the return of native polecats. Interestingly feral ferrets, a domesticated form of the polecat, have been caught in large numbers by a volunteer near Fakenham on the Wensum. Individuals that have escaped or been lost are not uncommon but populations rarely become established. An exception is in the Western Isles of Scotland where many are taken in their mink eradication campaign (see below). These animals are not a specific target of the project but do have the potential to cause damage to native species and any information regarding their presence would be interesting – please let your co-ordinator know if you regularly catch feral ferrets.

A FOCUS ON PARTNERS

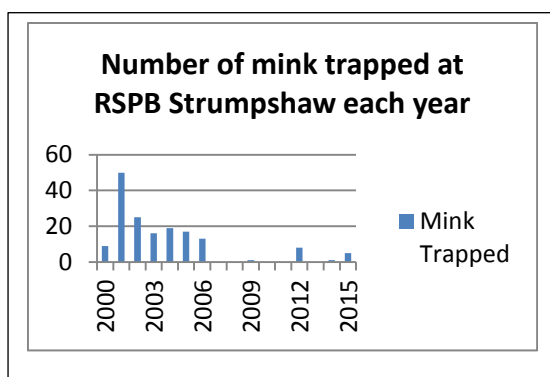
The following is from Matt Wilkinson, a warden at Strumpshaw RSPB reserve and a member of the Project Steering Group. Because of the conservation impact that introduced mink can have on native birds and mammals the RSPB are keen supporters of the Project across the county and carry out effective mink control on their reserves. The photograph at the end of Matt's piece is a 'present' of a fish left by an otter on a mink tracking plate – perhaps it felt it was too small!

The 1998 Norfolk Mammal Report talks of "continued low populations of mink in the Broads". Mink records at the Mid-Yare Reserves were described as "occasional" as lately as in the 1997. However, a spate of sightings and widespread signs in the year 2000 led to the decision to start trapping.

Trapping was carried out with a view to minimising predation of vulnerable birds (e.g. Bittern) & mammals (e.g. water vole). The RSPB manages over 6% of the land in the Norfolk Broads and has over half of all breeding waders on that land, therefore we have over half of our eggs in one basket so to speak and have to do what we can to protect them. We have taken 164 mink out of the ecosystem here at this reserve alone.

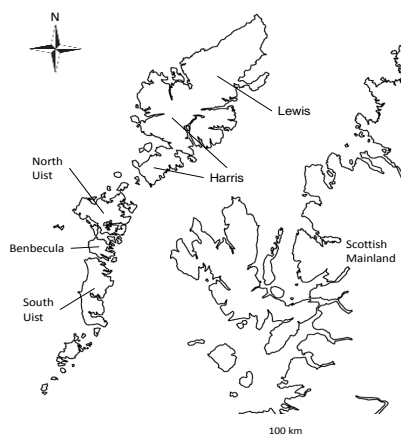
All predator control on RSPB reserves has to go through an approval process at our headquarters. Because mink is not a native species, proof of impact here at Mid Yare is assumed from knowledge of predation by mink elsewhere, rather than having to be demonstrated locally before action can be taken. Because the Mid Yare RSPB reserves are a National Nature Reserve (NNR), and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), all of our management work, including predator control, is subject to English Nature's approval as well.

Without this effort and that of our neighbours I personally do not believe we would have 14 pairs of breeding snipe at Buckenham or several bittern nests and numerous water voles here at Strumpshaw fen and our 30,000 plus visitors annually would not have those magical wildlife moments they regularly capture on camera.



THE HEBRIDEAN MINK PROJECT

There have been a number of projects over the years, around the country, to control mink. We plan to highlight examples in this and Subsequent Newsletters. The first we will look at is the Hebridean Mink Project, designed to protect important seabird colonies on the Western Isles archipelago through the control of mink. The initial phase ran between 2001 and 2006 at a cost of €2,762,834, half funded as a European Life Project. It aimed to eradicate mink from South Uist, Benbecula and North Uist, and reduce populations on South Harris (see Figure) to try and prevent further immigration. The project employed 11 trappers and a manager, and 230 mink were caught in cage traps from the Uists and 302 from Harris. The area trapped was 1114 km², with over 200,000 trap nights of effort.



Typical Hebridean trap position.
(from: www.north-harris.org)

Research coupled with analysis from operational elements of the project were fed back to help improve progress. Because of the tidal nature of the terrain and the often severe weather, mink rafts were not suitable. The Project relied on a network of permanent trap positions where the traps were dug into the banks. Success was improved by the use of dogs to locate mink dens during denning periods when mink are difficult to trap, and trapping was improved by 50% through the use of a chemical attractant. Mink were eradicated from the core area, despite their distribution being found to be 50% greater than expected once trapping had started.

Phase two of The Project is now underway with the objective of eradicating mink completely from the Western Isles. A network of over 7,000 traps is in place, some of which are monitored by 'Mink Police', which have also proved very effective for us. In total over 2,200 mink have been caught and mink numbers are down to very low levels. Modelling suggests that they are on course to eradicate mink by 2017, let's hope they succeed!

This is a very different Project to our own, costing over £6 million, rather dwarfing what we have to spend annually across Norfolk, which is in the region of £25,000 annually. However, the isolation of the Western Isles means that, if successful, they will not be re-invaded and they will remain mink free, with permanent protection for their valuable wildlife.

AND FINALLY

We welcome Dr Katy Owen, who has been appointed as the new Coordinator of the Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative, hosted by Norfolk County Council. In this role, Katy will take over administrative and general management duties for the NMP. She has a strong ecological background and has spent the last 2 years leading eradication projects for Himalayan balsam, Japanese knotweed and floating pennywort. Katy has a great deal of experience in European project management and grant writing, and will help us achieve greater recognition for the successes of the NMP and help securing our financial future.

We finally have our own website thanks very largely to a great deal of voluntary hard work by Stephen Mace. A fantastic site it is too; please do have a look at it:

<http://thenorfolkproject.org.uk/> .

You can now access all the information about this project and mink generally, see the latest position on numbers trapped in the current quarter (updated weekly), get copies of handouts, previous Newsletters, the latest H&S guidance and much more. Please help us keep everyone up-to-date with the latest position, by letting your Co-ordinator know reasonably promptly when you catch a mink. Also if you are unlikely to do any trapping over the current year please again let us know, we can then pass on any serviceable equipment – you will always be welcome to re-join at any time!

Finally a grateful THANK YOU from all of us to all our funders and supporters for helping us protect Norfolk's wildlife.

Simon Baker

Chair of the Steering Group and compiler of the Newsletter



Waveney, Yare & Lothingland IDB