



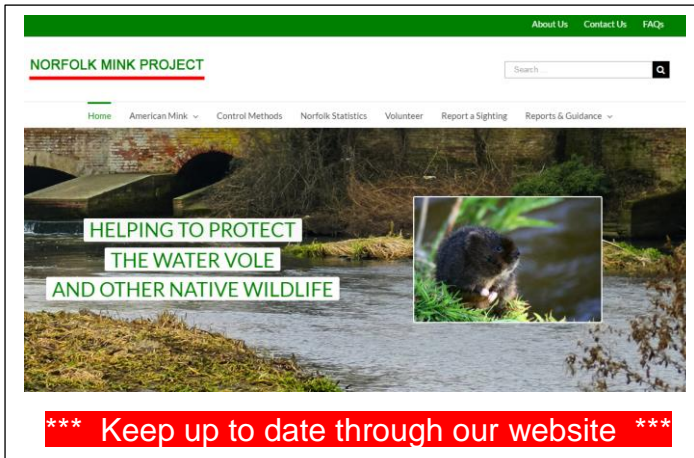
# NORFOLK MINK PROJECT

Annual Newsletter 4, January – December 2016

\*\*\* Website <https://thenorfolkproject.org.uk/> \*\*\*



**Norfolk  
Non-native  
Species  
Initiative**

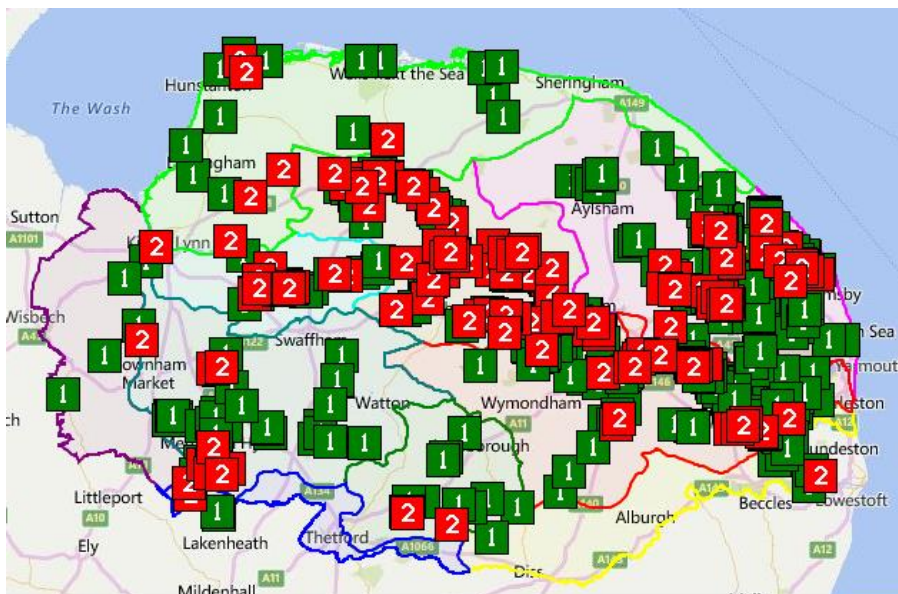


2016 STATISTICS	
Total Mink Caught	47
Rafts Deployed	412
Traps on Loan	420
Volunteers Involved	291

It has been another fantastic year for the Project, due to the effort that volunteers have put in throughout the county. The number of mink taken is **33% down on last year, following on from a fall of 30% the year before**. As you will see below, we believe that the fall in the number of mink taken year on year reflects a real reduction in the number present in the county. We have also been able to show, through your replies to our survey, that the value of **the contribution made by all our volunteers is in the region of £115,000 per annum!** Thank you all for the great work you put into monitoring and trapping but please keep chasing mink and help us create more mink free areas where wildlife can flourish.

## TRAPPING SUMMARY

The map below shows all positions where control was carried out during 2016. We are finally in the position where we are operating effectively in all catchments across Norfolk. However, there is more to be done extending the volunteer network in those catchments where we started work most recently. In those where we have been working longer volunteers will change and equipment will need to be replaced so our Co-ordinators, who are all part time, will have plenty to do.

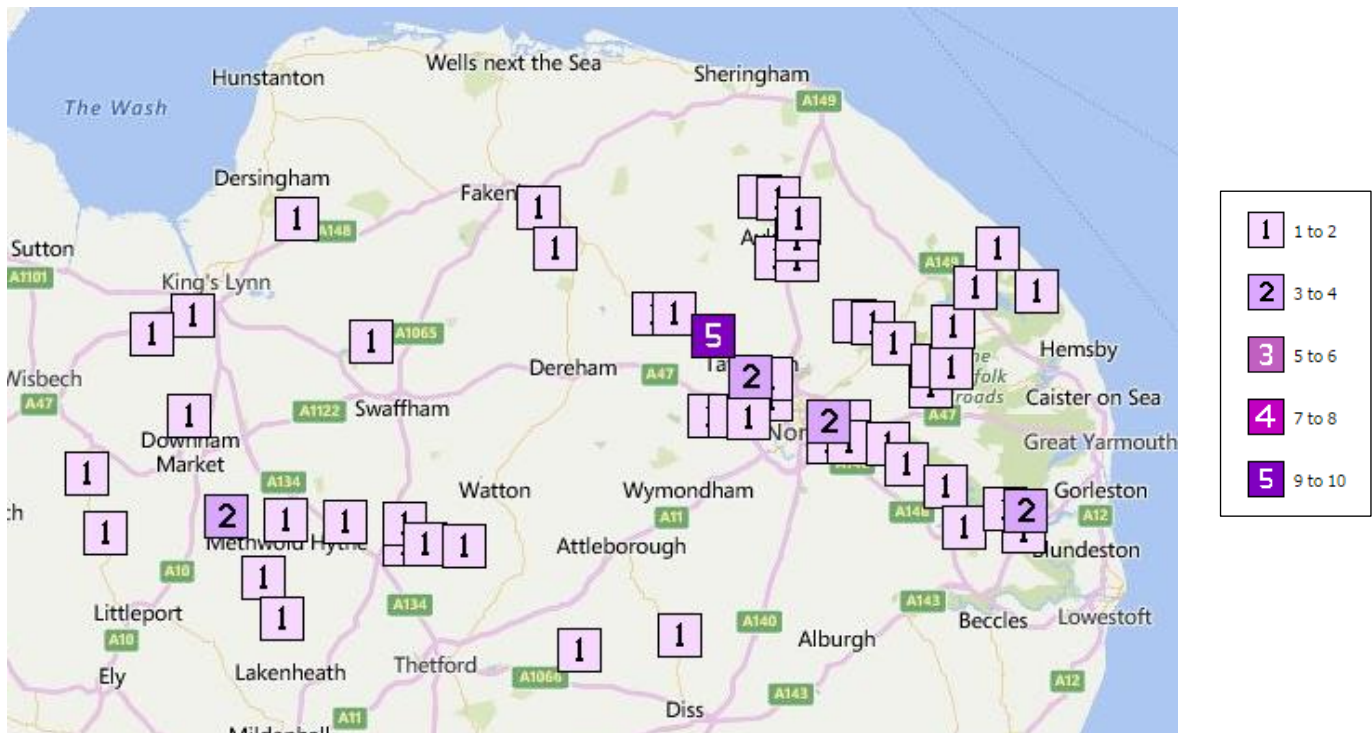


**Raft & trap positions current in 2017**



The second map shows the positions of all captures and other evidence of mink recorded in 2016. The current 'hotspot' is on the Lower Wensum, around Norwich and along the Yare. If you are helping to control mink in these areas in particular please try and ensure your rafts and traps are being used as effectively as possible.

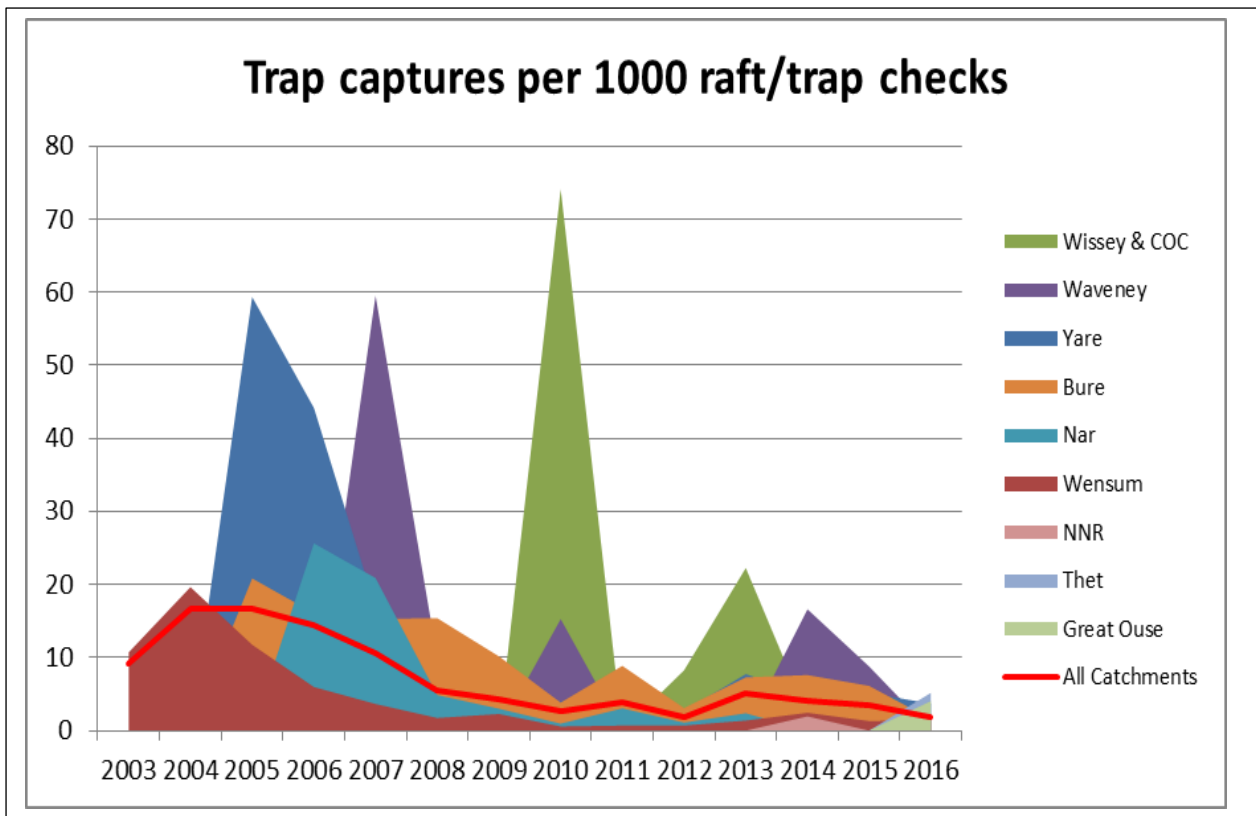
**Number of mink 'events' (captures, sightings, field sign etc.) per tetrad (2 x 2 km<sup>2</sup>) in 2016.**



**CHANGE IN SIZE OF THE NORFOLK MINK POPULATION**

We have been fortunate this winter to have had a PhD student, Chris Pyatt, working at the Broads Authority offices for 3 months analysing our data. Whilst we know the number of mink killed, Chris has been looking at how the underlying population has changed. This is an important step forward, as the number of mink killed might just reflect the amount of trapping that was done and not the number of mink present. To determine the effect of the project on the mink population we have used an index called "kill per unit effort". This is the number of mink killed for each unit of control effort (in this case for every 1000 raft/trap checks). The fewer mink we capture for each unit of effort, the fewer mink we can assume are present in the catchment / county.

We don't actually record the number of raft/trap checks being made so we have estimated this based on the results of the volunteer survey that many of you completed. A huge thank you to all those who did, it was a massive help. The graph below shows the number of mink trapped and killed per unit of effort expended by the project. In all catchments we see an initial spike in trapping success followed by a slow trickle of captures. This suggests that most mink in an area are captured fairly quickly and that the population is then held at a much lower level in subsequent years.



ABOVE - Trends from all Norfolk catchments in the number of mink killed per 1000 raft/trap checks. Trapping first started in the Wensum, followed by the Yare, Bure, Nar, & Waveney. The Wissey & Cut-Off Channel were added in 2009 and the other catchments in the last few years, hence the later spikes in catch rates. The overall message is - **We are succeeding in reducing the number of mink in Norfolk substantially – now let’s see if we can make whole catchments effectively ‘mink free’!**

## CATCHMENT REPORTS

### BURE, YARE & THET

Stephen Mace

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MINK KILL & STATUS 2016	Catchment	Count	Status
	Bure	13	Red Circle
	Yare	16	Red Circle
	Thet	1	Yellow Circle

### Bure

The number of mink taken is an impressive 55% decrease from the previous year. Like last year, Ranworth and surrounding areas produced the most but overall things were fairly spread out. There were 9 sightings, some of which lead to captures and others to new volunteers joining the project via visiting the website. Generally things are running smoothly, we are seeing all the hard work paying off with numbers falling year on year and hopefully water voles returning along with an increase in other native wildlife. Long term monitoring is key to keeping the numbers down and now that we have mink at a relatively low level it is important to keep up the good work. We could do with some more coverage to the north-west of Aylsham and around the town, any contacts in this area would be much appreciated.

## Yare

We caught the same number of mink as the previous year. Once again most of them were caught around Norwich and downstream with several sightings also made. Some more volunteers have joined in this area and hopefully we can start seeing a decline soon. Coverage is good along the main river but we could do with a little more coverage in the west of the catchment.



*Mink photographed recently on the river Chet. One, assumed to be this individual, was trapped shortly afterwards!*

© N Wyatt

## Thet

Just one mink was caught in this catchment, near East Harling, after field sign was found in the area. The Thet is a new catchment for the Project and 2016 has given us a chance to see what the mink population is like. Much of the catchment has good habitat for mink where they can easily live without even being detected for a long period. Several volunteers have joined over the course of the year and the rafts that have been put out are in very good locations. We have started to build up some nice coverage on the south side of the A11, with the northern side needing some more coverage. If anyone has some possible contacts please pass on my details or let me know.

## NORTH NORFOLK RIVERS GT. OUSE & NAR

Rory Hart  
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MINK KILL & STATUS 2016	North Norfolk	0	●
	Great Ouse	3	●
	Nar	0	●

## North Norfolk Rivers

The network of volunteers in the North Norfolk Rivers catchment remains active despite having only sparse indications of mink in the area. Some personnel have moved or changed jobs but all sites that have been working with the project continue to do so. It was therefore a surprise when two reports of a mink being seen near Bayfield and Stody were sent via the project web site. Trappers on the Glaven were made aware of the news but no other information regarding the animal has been received. Signs of mink have also been recorded at South Creake on the Burn and on land near Dersingham. Despite sparse sightings it is probable that there are animals breeding in the catchments and maintaining a vigilant approach to control is important. The project continues to replace equipment where rafts have become damaged or worn. Please do contact me if you need to renew or increase your stock of materials. It is pleasing that water voles are present on several sites where volunteers are carrying out monitoring or trapping.

## Great Ouse

There have been sporadic reports of mink in several locations across the catchment with animals caught at Welney and Wiggshall. Reports have also come in via the Project website of mink at Outwell, Gravel Bank and Tilney Fen end. In the forthcoming year we hope to expand the network of volunteers based on the locations where mink activity has been identified. Areas of particular interest are industrial sites with suitable habitat where mink presence may be overlooked. Other areas are the Black Ditch Drain where mink have been seen and south of Downham Market where several mink were caught prior to the project expanding into the Great Ouse catchment.

## Nar

Mink do not appear to be abundant on the lower Nar, although they could be under recorded. There is a great deal of habitat favourable to mink, especially the old mineral working sites at Wormegay and West Bilney where use of a 'mink police' unit may be particularly appropriate. We aim to increase our presence in this section of the catchment in the near future.

The upper Nar has been almost mink free for another year, with just one seen near West Acre from the bird-watching hide there. The local water vole population is thriving, as too is the other wildlife along this beautiful river.

## WENSUM AND WISSEY

Paul Gambling

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### MINK KILL & STATUS 2016

Wensum	12	
Wissey	2	

## Wensum

There has been a slight increase in the number of mink detected and caught compared with last year, and once again their presence has been patchy. All but one of the captures were in the Lenwade-Attlebridge and Hellesdon-Costessey areas. Most of the 15 occurrences of mink signs were also in those two areas, but two sets of signs were also found at Lyng and at Guist. The apparent lack of activity upstream from Pensthorpe, and between Guist and Lenwade suggests we may now be mink-free there at the moment. However, given the ability of mink to travel long distances and re-populate empty stretches of the river, we will be continuing to keep a close watch.

## Wissey

Mink signs were detected on 11 occasions with many of these on the lower and middle reaches of the River Wissey, particularly around Hilgay and STANTA. Some of these appear to be repeat signs from the same individual mink leaving footprints on several rafts in an area. Two mink were caught in January in the Feltwell-Hockwold area, thank you John. Apart from these, almost all mink were detected in the second half of the year, and appear to be mink passing through the area since they were not seen again. The upper reaches of the Wissey and tributaries appear to be mink free at the moment and by blocking their potential progress upstream we hope to maintain this. We are looking for people to monitor rafts in the Wissey catchment, so if you have access to a stretch of river or stream, and would like to give it a try, then we would very much like to hear from you.

**WAVENEY AND LITTLE OUSE**

**Penny Hemphill**

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&

**Stephen Mace** (Norfolk bank of Waveney)

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**MINK KILL & STATUS 2016**

**Waveney**

**10**



**Little Ouse**

**11**



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. 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 2016 is 10 mink trapped in Suffolk and 0 in Norfolk. This continues the decline seen last year and mirrors what has occurred more generally over both Norfolk and Suffolk in 2016. However, one of the first trappers to join the Suffolk Project ten years ago lives near Aldeby and is still going strong, catching 4 mink in the last 6 months of the year.

The Norfolk bank of the Waveney has been very quiet with no mink taken and only one sighting, which was on the Haddiscoe Dam. I (Stephen) am still looking for new volunteers on the Norfolk side, if you know of anyone who might want to join please pass on my details or contact me.

**Little Ouse**

The decline in the Little Ouse has continued with 11 caught this year compared to 16 the year before. Both this catchment and the Waveney have had the lowest number caught since the campaign began!

**THE VALUE OF YOUR VOLUNTEERING**

The main aim of calculating the value of our volunteers is to show funding bodies how much bang we're getting for their buck, and encourage them to keep supporting us! Thank you to the 10 % that responded to our survey and helped us to do this. We calculated volunteer effort on a yearly basis in terms of the monetary value of the time devoted to the project in checking rafts and traps. The overall number is calculated by combining 'raft check effort' and 'trapping effort'. We've calculated these by counting the number of raft/trap checks occurring each year and then converting this to a monetary value by multiplying by the hourly rate that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) would contribute in order to pay salaried staff to do the work. We did the calculation in two ways and got answers for the most recent years of the project of around £40,000 by one method and over £300,000 by the other. The real value will be somewhere in between the two, our best estimate is that it is of the order of **£115,000 per year**. This is supported by some £20,000 per year donated by our funders. They are getting a great return on their investment and volunteers are clearly contributing enormously to the project and helping to make it the great success that it is!

## A FOCUS ON PARTNERS

Another of our partners is the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and Kirsty Bailey, their Reserves Officer for the Broads, Coast and Wetlands has given us her perspective on the project.

*Norfolk Wildlife Trust (NWT) manage a number of nature reserves in the Norfolk Broads all of which are specially designated as being of European or international importance due to the assemblage of rare and vulnerable birds and habitats present. We have a number of mink rafts across our Broadland reserves which are checked regularly to detect mink. Mink are generalist predators but pose a particular threat to the water vole, a UK Priority Species which has suffered a population decline of 94% across their previous UK range. Fortunately, water voles are still present on many NWT Broadland reserves due to the mink control methods that NWT carry out. In some reserves, rafts are used frequently by water voles (and others, see below) with little evidence of mink seen for years.*

*NWT has helped support mink control across the county by donating funds and new mink rafts to the Norfolk Mink Project. Control needs to occur across whole catchments in order to be successful and The Project is key to ensuring that this is done effectively.*

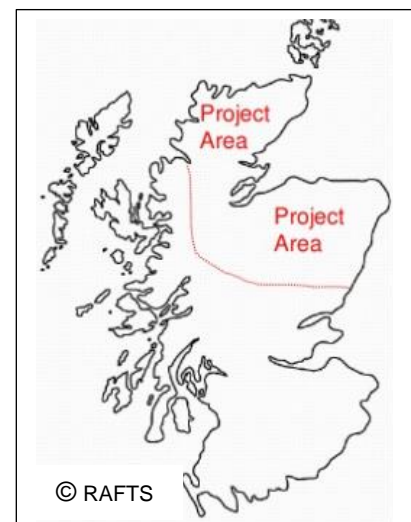


Mallard resting on a mink raft (© NWT)

## THE SCOTTISH MINK INITIATIVE

In the second mink control project to be highlighted, after last year's look at work in the Western Isles, we will look at The Scottish Mink Initiative. The first phase was launched in 2011, following trials that started in 2006, and showed that mink control could be coordinated on a very large scale (see map opposite). The second phase covers about 29,500 km<sup>2</sup> and showed that mink operations could be successfully coordinated locally by Fisheries Trusts rather than Project Officers (*an approach not open to us – Ed.*)

2,020 rafts have been deployed since the start, with about 540 active in 2014/15. Since 2006 they have



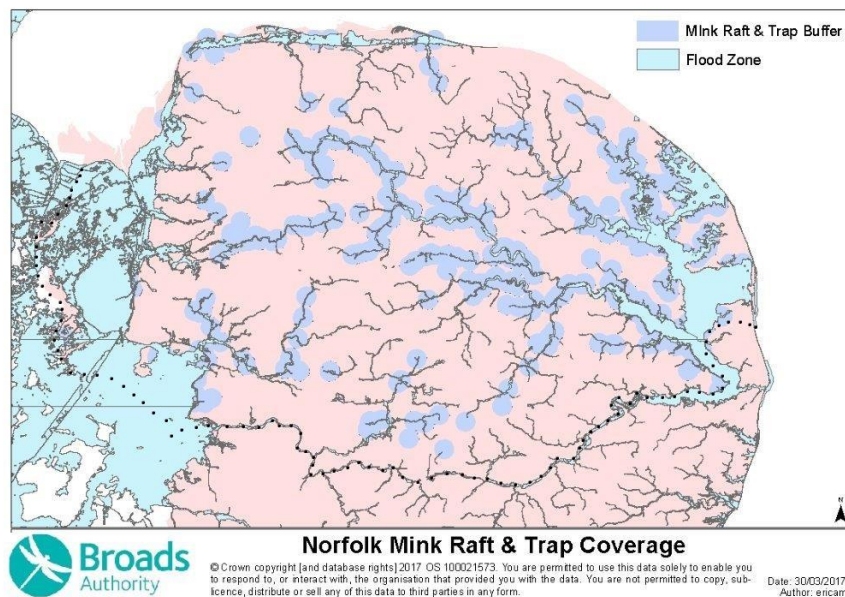
caught about 1,600 mink with only 98 caught in the 12 months to July 2015. Their analysis of trends from the catchments where they have the longest runs of data indicates that mink numbers will reduce by 40% in 4 years and to 6% of initial levels after 9 years. Their study also showed the importance of a few rafts in key locations; a mere 6% of all rafts were responsible for over 50% of all mink signs recorded. As with our own project, money is tight and they will be looking at ways of reducing costs whilst maximising the impact on the mink population and the benefits for native biodiversity. Further details can be found at: <http://www.asfb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2016-Annual-Review.pdf>.

## AND FINALLY

If you are not yet a regular user of our fantastic website I urge you to have a look at it: <https://thenorfolkproject.org.uk/>.

You can access information about the project, mink generally, see the latest position on numbers trapped in the current quarter (updated weekly), get copies of handouts, previous Newsletters and the latest H&S guidance and much more. Over the next year we intend to add information about introduced invasive species more generally and the environmental work of our partners that may be of interest.

While he was working on our data, Chris Pyatt also looked at how effective we were with our coverage of Norfolk's waterways. The map below shows 1.5 km radius blue circles (often merging) around all current trapping points. These approximate to a female mink's home range.



You can see that together we have great coverage of the counties waterways so 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 editor of the Newsletter



Waveney, Yare & Lothingland IDB

