



Waterlife Recovery Trust



NEWSLETTER 10

April 2025

THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

In the last newsletter I wrote about how our working methods and ideas are attracting partners in Wales and Scotland, which of course is excellent, but we ought not to imagine that the scourge of American mink is limited to our British Isles. Pretty much all of Europe is suffering from the same problem, although the native wildlife being most battered by this introduced predator varies from country to country. I learned much from our continental counterparts recently, when participating in three IUCN-sponsored workshops, and at the same time was able to present our results to an audience representing over 20 countries.



The European mink - smaller than its American counterpart, and now close to extinction. This species has never lived in Britain or Ireland to our knowledge. There is every prospect that WRT's success in eradicating American mink could help the recovery of the European species. French, German, Spanish and Finnish conservationists have recently shown a lot of interest in our work.

Perhaps the single most striking difference between our situation and theirs is that there's not one, but two, species of mink on the continent - one introduced, the other native - the European mink. The two species look similar, but the European mink is smaller and part of a balanced predator/prey community that has evolved over millennia. It is driven out when its American cousin arrives, to the extent that today it survives in a few scattered remnant populations and is in serious danger of extinction. It is classified as Critically Endangered on the IUCN red list of endangered species, just one step away from oblivion. Where the two

species co-exist, there is of course the danger of catching the 'wrong' mink in traps, so great care must be taken to avoid inadvertently causing harm to the animal needing protection. This is where our smart live traps would be so beneficial, but as yet this technology is little used in Europe.

I think it's fair to say that our progress towards eradicating American mink is well ahead of anything on the continent, and certainly there has been a lot of follow-up interest from countries desperately keen to see the back of this invader. Many were particularly interested in our use of anal gland scent lures, and consequently WRT's Bill Mansfield has been immortalised on video, showing the world how to extract this liquid without spraying it over face and clothes - an experience that lives in the memory long after the clothes have been tossed on the bonfire. We very much look forward to seeing our experience and expertise contributing to important conservation achievements on the European continent and indeed in Ireland.

A NEW PARTNER IN SOUTH WALES

Andrew Martin contacted WRT in August 2024, seeking guidance on how to remove mink from the nature reserve in Carmarthenshire where he volunteers, before then becoming a pioneering WRT partner in South Wales. Here's his story.



After moving to Wales, I visited the Wildlife Trust of South and West Wales (WTSWW) nature reserve Ffrwd Farm Mire near Pembrey. It was the site of a water vole release in 2014, and I helped out with mink control. There were rafts with clay trays under a roof, and I checked them every week to look for mink footprints in the clay. If prints appeared, I replaced the clay trays with mink traps. We then had to devise a rota of volunteers to check the traps daily, release any water voles that had been caught, and captured mink were

dispatched, either by a neighbouring farmer or by me.

There were drawbacks to this way of doing things. We would often run the traps for a couple of weeks without catching a mink, despite many hours of volunteer effort and travelling to the site. Every time a mink had definitely investigated the raft (to leave footprints), there was no trap in place. WTSWW had a policy of not trapping mink during spring and summer, so there was no point in checking for prints then. The reasoning was that trapping before breeding territories were set up, and catching dispersing young in autumn, would be almost as effective as trapping throughout the summer. To me, it seemed illogical; if trapping mink to preserve native wildlife is acceptable, why allow them to breed successfully?

In November 2023, I went to a workshop in Abergavenny, with the title "Can we eliminate mink from Wales?". Like almost everyone else attending, before the meeting my reaction was "Fat Chance"! But by the end, when we had heard from Tony Martin (no relation) about the methodology developed by WRT - smart traps, collecting every kind of data possible from each mink to compile a massive database, and using the data for modelling and prediction, and being able to eliminate mink from East Anglia, we realised that a mink-free Wales ought to be achievable.

As a volunteer, I did my best to spread the word. I fitted a remote monitoring device to one of the traps at Ffrwd Farm Mire, and placed a new raft and smart trap on a nearby smallholding.



A WRT-style smart mink raft deployed by Andrew

WTSWW changed its policy to allow mink trapping during the breeding season, and in less than one year I've caught five mink at the reserve (two during the former no trapping period) and one at the neighbouring smallholding. The smart traps have reduced the volunteer time spent per mink caught by an order of magnitude, and I'm very glad to know that more groups and volunteers elsewhere in Wales are setting traps using the WRT methodology. Momentum is building.

COUNTY TRAPPING ROUNDUP

By Emily Wilkinson

The database now contains data from a whopping 49 Great British counties: 42 in England, five in Wales and two in Scotland, thanks to WRT's Project Officers, volunteers and partner organisations. As of April 10th (the 100th day of the year), we have collectively removed 545 American mink in 2025 to date. Of those, 83 have come from Lincolnshire - a county funded by Natural England under the Thames to Lincoln project with a complete smart trap network now in place. The county with the second highest number of captures, 60, is Kent, a county within our Waterlife Recovery Southeast (WRSE) initiative, with sparse funding so far and only 70 active traps, yet the density of mink in the county must be huge! Later in this newsletter Tony discusses the mink hotspot that is Romney Marsh, from where most of the Kent mink came.

At the other end of the scale, it is reassuring to see that Norfolk, Suffolk and Herts have seen no mink catches whatsoever in 2025, while Cambridgeshire has recorded only 4, and these predictably near its borders with Lincs and Bedfordshire, both of which still host lots of mink. Just look at the annual decline of catches in Cambridgeshire - from 146 in 2021 to 18 in 2024 - a testament to the dedicated hard work of the Countryside Regeneration Trust. Cambs is in line to be the next mink-free county.

As expected, monthly captures have increased this year from January to March, the height of the mating season, and, as I write, the daily totals are slowly diminishing in April. The lull in captures will last until the kit dispersal season begins in July. The March 2025 total was 229, almost exactly the same as caught in March 2024 with far fewer traps than now. The drop in Catch per unit effort (CPUE) overall is due to the continuing reduction in mink numbers in those areas where we and our partner organisations have been operating for a year or more.

Annual Mink Captures 1st Jan 2021 to 10th April 2025						
County	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Total
Argyll and Bute	0	0	15	59	11	85
Bedfordshire	16	24	107	88	11	246
Berkshire	0	0	3	44	1	48
Buckinghamshire	1	3	17	60	21	102
Cambridgeshire	146	56	27	18	4	251
Cheshire	0	0	10	13	1	24
Clwyd	0	0	0	0	1	1
Cumbria	0	2	31	80	24	137
Derbyshire	0	0	0	94	17	111
Devon	0	0	0	8	0	8
Dorset	0	20	6	8	0	34
Durham	0	0	46	14	0	60
Dyfed	0	0	0	3	4	7
East Riding of Yorkshire	0	0	1	4	1	6
East Sussex	0	15	18	26	19	78
Essex	8	18	36	169	28	259
Gloucestershire	0	0	0	0	1	1
Greater Manchester	0	0	0	30	6	36
Gwynedd	0	0	8	28	7	43
Hampshire	0	0	1	47	9	57
Herefordshire	0	0	0	2	0	2
Hertfordshire	8	5	5	7	0	25
Kent	0	3	46	43	60	152
Lancashire	0	0	0	0	1	1
Leicestershire	0	2	4	23	16	45
Lincolnshire	50	101	168	441	83	843
London North	0	0	2	13	0	15
London South	0	0	0	1	0	1
Norfolk	83	34	5	0	0	122
North Yorkshire	0	0	4	6	2	12
Northamptonshire	1	9	25	88	24	147
Northumberland	0	0	3	5	1	9
Nottinghamshire	1	0	7	110	58	176
Oxfordshire	0	0	10	21	2	33
Powys	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ross and Cromarty	0	3	2	2	0	7
Rutland	0	0	3	9	1	13
Shropshire	0	0	0	0	4	4
South Yorkshire	29	23	22	42	13	129
Staffordshire	9	18	16	122	37	202
Suffolk	27	8	4	1	0	40
Surrey	0	0	1	52	52	105
Tyne & Wear	0	1	5	3	0	9
West Glamorgan	0	0	0	0	1	1
West Midlands	0	0	1	0	4	5
West Sussex	1	3	10	63	10	87
West Yorkshire	0	0	0	28	5	33
Wiltshire	0	0	0	5	4	9
Worcestershire	0	1	1	2	0	4
Total	380	349	670	1882	545	3826

LIFE AS WRT'S PARTNERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

By Emily Wilkinson

Back in September last year, I had to leave my post as the North London and Hertfordshire Project Officer as I was moving out of area. And by out of area, I mean to Devon, so definitely not



It's heartwarming to hear from volunteers who are seeing ducklings after many years without.

commutable! I had been thoroughly enjoying my time as PO so I was really upset about the prospect of leaving WRT behind, but thankfully after some conversations with Tony and Malc, I was offered the post of Partnership and Development Officer. I thought I'd take this opportunity to tell you a little bit about the work I've been doing.

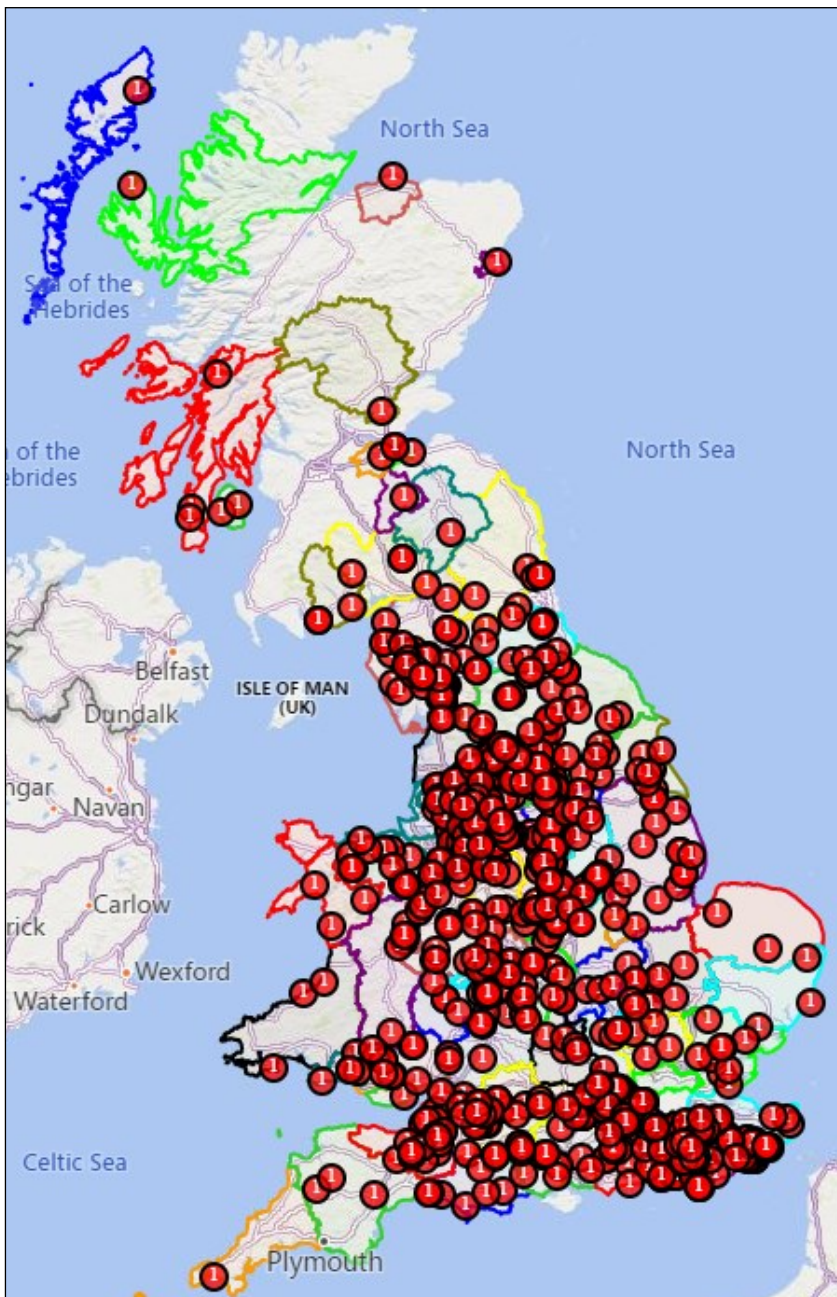
The position was newly created when I took my post and has developed in the months since I started. My tasks range from helping Tony put together the Newsletter (I hope you like it!) to coordinating trapping in Kent and Sussex, writing grant applications and being the secretary of WRT Steering Groups. It is all keeping my role extremely interesting and I am learning an awful lot.

A massive part of what I do though, is guiding and developing potential partner organisations and individuals from outside the current WRT funded areas. I answer enquiries about how to get projects going, offer advice to landowners losing livestock to mink, and log data from those wanting to be a partner. I talk teams through how to set up smart devices, suggest the best places to locate traps and convince partners to get trained up on using our database. After beginning work in the Southeast, a large amount of new contacts have come from this area, but we are also getting contacted by people from all across Great Britain. It is brilliant helping so many people to start trapping - I am watching the project spread in real time and it is really exciting.

Another of my roles is to review and plot all sightings of mink submitted by the public through our website. As word of WRT and its work has spread, there has been a massive and very welcome increase in the number of mink sightings being reported. Over the last year we have added over 800 of these sightings to the database. In areas where we are already established, our Project Officers will often get in touch with the observer in order to get the mink caught! When we aren't working in the area, we have a team (including myself) responding with advice where



A silver/grey mink reported from Cumbria. This colour morph has survived in the wild little changed from fur farm escapees and today grey mink can be found from Argyll to southern England. Most are males.



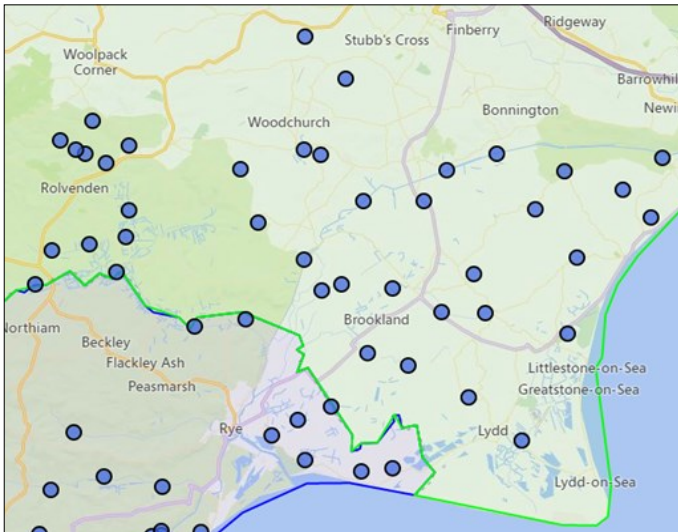
Mink sightings logged on the database over the past year. Recent county hotspots have been Yorkshire, Somerset and Surrey.

appropriate. But, even when we can't do anything to help, the sightings coming in are really important. Creating maps of sightings can be massively helpful for partners already working in an area. They can see where they could productively focus or expand their efforts. Moreover, the sightings are extremely informative when we are looking for funding in an area - it proves mink are present and makes an irrefutable case for the need for eradication. And, when we get that funding, it gives us a list of potential volunteers and places from which to start developing an effective trapping network. So, if you see a mink anywhere in Britain, please do report the event through our website. Every single report contributes valuable information that will help lead to the removal of this introduced predator from our countryside and allow the recovery of its prey species. Please include photos or videos and as much descriptive information as possible.

I am thoroughly enjoying my new role, and am excited to see what challenges next come my way!

ROMNEY MARSH, NEW FRONTIER

Once described as an 'uninhabitable morass', Romney Marsh, on Kent's border with East Sussex, is the largest wetland on England's south coast and includes the RSPB's Dungeness reserve. Criss-crossed by waterways, bounded by some of the most picturesque countryside in England and once home to several fur farms, it was with little surprise that we learned of mink being major predators of ground-nesting birds, water voles and chicken coops in this area. Moreover, someone sent us a video from here of a white mink with a dark cap and dorsal stripe, unlike any other we've even heard of in Britain, and subsequently rumours emerged of similar mink being shot and trapped in south Kent. Could there really be a population of white mink found nowhere except in this fascinating corner of England?



Romney Marsh, Dungeness, Rye Harbour and the coastal plain straddling Kent and East Sussex. Each dot shows a smart mink raft, most of them established in 2025.

Kent is one of seven counties comprising the Waterlife Recovery Southeast initiative. There's lots of enthusiasm for removing its mink, but WRT currently doesn't have the funds to employ Project Officers to allow us to set up the comprehensive trap network necessary to achieve eradication. Cometh the hour, cometh the man, however. Software engineer and marsh dweller Mark Gilchrist contacted us some time ago to volunteer his services as a trapper, and we've recently been able to supply Mark and his merry band of collaborators with smart mink rafts sponsored by Affinity Water and the High Weald National Landscape, with the agreement that Mark would freeze his mink for collection and do all the database and

other necessary IT work. Less than two months later, Mark has recruited tens of landowners and volunteer trap managers, deployed 38 traps and overseen the removal of a remarkable 41 mink in less than three months. The survival prospects of the small pockets of water voles that have somehow managed to cling on here have suddenly been transformed. How Mark has managed to fit all this in to his busy life is a mystery to us all.

AND FINALLY, I'd like to pay homage to Simon Baker, WRT's Vice-Chair, who has very recently stepped back from most of his work for our charity, having more than earned a rest. Simon is a legendary figure in the invasive species world, having co-led England's successful coypu eradication project in the 1980s before establishing and leading the Norfolk mink project, in many ways the fore-runner of WRT. Simon did most of the work that led to WRT becoming a registered charity, and recently spearheaded our largest and most challenging assignment to date - the Thames to Lincoln project. Apart from investing a huge amount of time into WRT's work, Simon has been an invaluable source of information and advice to me personally, and without doubt we would not be where we are without him. To my relief, Simon has kindly consented to remain as a Trustee, albeit now with a mink/life balance that had somehow eluded him over the past decade or more! Thank you, Simon.

With my best wishes,

Tony Martin

Chair of the Waterlife Recovery Trust Board of Trustees

