



# Water Vole

## Local Biodiversity Action Plan

### Species English Name (Scientific name)

WATER VOLE (ARVICOLA AMPHIBIOUS changed from ARVICOLA TERRESTRIS)

### Associated Habitat Action Plans:

Ponds, Reedbeds



### Ecology

#### Appearance

The Water Vole is the largest of the British vole species weighing between 225-310g. Water vole's are commonly mistaken for rats. However, unlike the rat the water vole has a brown and shaggy coat, a blunt nose, short furry tail and small ears.

#### Habitat

Occurs mainly on well-vegetated lowland ponds, rivers, canals and drainage ditches with steeply sided banks. Usually within 2m of the waters edge.

#### Food

Water voles are largely herbivorous and although grass forms a major part of their diet they have been known to eat up to 227 different plant species. They also eat bark, rhizomes, bulbs and roots and very occasionally fish, snails and crayfish. In order to survive the water vole needs to consume 80% of its body weight in food daily.

#### Predators

Water voles are known to be predated by fox, mink, domestic cat, otter, stoat and grey heron. Of



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these the mink poses the greatest threat to their continued survival in Great Britain and has been, along with habitat loss, a major cause of their decline in recent years.

### Life Style

- \* Active mainly during the day
- \* Efficient swimmer and diver
- \* Dig burrows in banks for shelter and breeding
- \* Occupy a linear home range of up to 130m for males and 77m for females depending upon habitat quality.
- \* Breeding season is March to October during which time 2-3 litters of 4-6 offspring will be reared.

### Current status

The water vole was once common and widespread in lowland Britain but has suffered a significant decline in numbers and distribution in recent years.

A repeat of the 1989-90 National survey carried out in 1996-98 found that the water vole had been lost from over 89% of the sites it occupied in 1939. In the Cheshire region 46.2% of sites were positive for signs of water voles in 1990 whereas historically 62.5% were positive (Strachan & Jefferies, 1993). Water voles can be described as widespread and locally common in the Cheshire region, favouring backwater streams, ponds and canals.

The water vole is short-listed on the U.K. Steering Group Report, Volume 1 (1995) and as such the report contains a costed Biodiversity Action Plan for the Water Vole. A national Biodiversity Steering Group has been set up with the contact point being Alistair Driver of the Environment Agency.

Water voles are protected by law and were included on Schedule 5, Section 9 (4) a & b of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in 1998.

### Threats

- \* Habitat loss (heavy grazing; river engineering; lack of suitable management)
- \* Population fragmentation
- \* Predation by American mink
- \* Pollution
- \* Persecution
- \* Drying out and flooding of dikes/ditches
- \* Development Pressure



## How are we helping to conserve water voles in the Cheshire region?

- \* Environment Agency River Corridor Surveys document presence.
- \* Developments are being screened to take into account the requirements of water voles
- \* Records being collected by rECOrd.
- \* The North West Lowland Water Vole Project - Cheshire area Project Officer - Richard Gardner based at Cheshire Wildlife Trust. [Project leaflet.](#)

## Objectives, targets and actions

Objectives, targets and actions to help conserve the water vole in the Cheshire region can be found on the [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\)](#) along with full details of our progress so far.

## How to find out more about water voles

Other local and national plans

UK Species Action Plan for Water Vole: [www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=115](http://www.ukbap.org.uk/UKPlans.aspx?ID=115)

Staffordshire Biodiversity Action Plan: [www.sbap.org.uk/](http://www.sbap.org.uk/)

Information on ecology and management

Water for Wildlife Project: [www.wildlifetrusts.org/index.php?section=environment:wfw](http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/index.php?section=environment:wfw)

The Mammal Society Water Vole Fact Sheet: [www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/water\\_vole.shtml](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/mammal/water_vole.shtml)

ARKive factfile: [www.arkive.org/species/ARK/mammals/Arvicola\\_terrestris/more\\_info.html](http://www.arkive.org/species/ARK/mammals/Arvicola_terrestris/more_info.html)

Identification and recording card: Know Your Vole

JNCC publication: Harris, S., Morris, P., Wray, S. and Yalden, D. A review of British mammals: population estimates and conservation status of British mammals other than cetaceans.

[www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2759](http://www.jncc.gov.uk/page-2759)

Vale Royal Borough Council Water Vole Species Recording card

## How can you get involved?

- \* If you see a water vole or would like to search for water vole records in a particular area please visit the website of the Cheshire, Warrington, Halton and Wirral Local Records Centre (rECOrd) at : [www.record-lrc.co.uk](http://www.record-lrc.co.uk)
- \* Join Cheshire Mammal Group - [website](#)



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### Contact details

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National Lead Partners UK Water Vole Steering Group

National Lead Contact Alastair Driver, Environment Agency

### References and Glossary

HMSO (1995): Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, Volume 1: Meeting the Rio Challenge, London.

HMSO (1995): Biodiversity: The UK Steering Group Report, Volume 2: Action Plans, London.

U.K. Water Vole Steering Group (1997): Species Action Plan for the U.K. - Water vole, *Arvicola terrestris*.

Mitchell-Jones, A.J. (1996): Mammals in England - A Conservation Action Priority List, English Nature.

Morris, P. (1993): A Red Data Book for British Mammals, Mammal Society.

Strachan, R. & Jefferies, D. (1993): The water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) in Britain 1980-1990: Its Distribution and Changing Status, The Vincent Wildlife Trust

