

WATER VOLE *ARVICOLA TERRESTRIS* SPECIES ACTION PLAN**1. INTRODUCTION**

The water vole is a UKBAP priority species³⁹ and is in urgent need of action both nationally and in Caerphilly county borough.

| Relevant Legislation/Species Status | |
|--|--------|
| priority (P) or species of conservation concern (S) (1998) | P |
| EC Habitats Directive | - |
| Conservation Regs 1994 | - |
| Berne Convention 1982 | - |
| Bonn Convention 1979 | - |
| CITES 1975 | - |
| WCA 1981 (as amended) | Sch. 5 |



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2. CURRENT STATUS**2.1 UK and Wales**

The water vole is found throughout mainland Britain in a variety of bank side habitats and is the UK's largest vole. It was once considered a widespread and common riparian mammal, but it has declined dramatically over the past 40 years. It was estimated that by the year 2000 there would have been a 94% loss in the number of water voles since 1939. This is mainly attributed to habitat deterioration and pollution of watercourses. The explosion of the mink population in Britain has also had an impact because they commonly feed on water voles.

The water vole inhabits slow-moving rivers, streams, ditches and ponds, particularly those with well-developed banks. Unusually for a small mammal, the water vole is more active during the day than at night. It feeds on grass and waterside vegetation, and is a skilled swimmer, both underwater and on the surface. Breeding takes place in underground tunnels and therefore an adequate bank in which to dig a series of burrows is necessary. It also requires slow-moving waters in order to escape from predators. It is now an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct access to the habitats the water vole uses for shelter, or to disturb the species whilst occupying such habitats.

2.2 Caerphilly County Borough

Although it is likely to occur in the county borough records are scarce. A sample survey carried out by the Vincent Wildlife Trust in 1989-1990 recorded water voles on the Monmouth-Brecon Canal between Abergavenny and Brecon, however no survey has been undertaken on the Crumlin section of the canal.

Evidence of the species has been found at several sites away from traditional main rivers, occurring in wet pastures and fen sites, and it has been recorded in the following SINCs⁸:

- 55: **Nelson Bog (SSSI)**
- 119: **Tir Waun Meadows**
- 164: **Gypsy Lane Wetland**

Further work is needed to confirm the importance of these and other sites in the county borough.

2.3 Links with Habitats

- **Wetlands** (rivers and streams, ponds, fens, reedbeds, lakes and reservoirs)
- *Species-rich Grasslands* (rhos pasture)

3. CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING THE SPECIES

- Lack of data on the distribution of the species may have led to accidental loss of the species from some areas.
- Loss and fragmentation of habitats.
- Predation, especially by the American mink (*Mustela vison*).
- Alteration of watercourses, e.g. culverting, diversions, and water abstractions, and flood defence maintenance work.
- Erosion of bank habitats, resulting from the trampling and overgrazing of bankside vegetation.
- Pollution of watercourses and poisoning by rodenticides.

4. CURRENT ACTION

- 4.1 Actions for water voles are included in LEAPs, including the Eastern Valleys LEAP covering the river catchment area for Caerphilly county borough¹⁵.
- 4.2 The Environment Agency considers impacts on water voles when dealing with applications for work in or adjacent to rivers.
- 4.3 The Vincent Wildlife Trust conducted a national survey for water voles in 1989-90, and there is ongoing research by the Environment Agency and Wildlife Trusts.
- 4.4 The VWT re-surveyed the 2,970 sites which comprise the Water Vole Survey of Britain in 1996-98.
- 4.5 The *Water Vole Conservation Handbook* provides practical management advice to developers, conservation organisations, planners and water engineers, etc¹⁴.
- 4.6 British Waterways have prepared a corporate BAP which will include positive actions to protect the water vole.
- 4.7 The Rhiw 2 Mill river care group (KWT) are managing ditch habitat adjacent to the River Sirhowy in order to encourage water voles back to the area.

5. OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

5.1 UK Objectives and Targets

- 5.1.1 Maintain the current distribution and abundance of the species in the UK.

- 5.1.2 Ensure water voles are present throughout their 1970s range by the year 2010, considering habitat management and possible translocation of populations to areas from where they have been lost.

5.2 Caerphilly Objectives and Targets

- 5.2.1 Clarify the current status and distribution of the water vole in Caerphilly county borough. (Target: 2004)
- 5.2.2 Maintain the current species population and distribution. (Target: ongoing)
- 5.2.3 Enhance, restore and create water vole habitat, setting population recovery targets according to local threats. (Target: 2010)

6. ACTION AND KEY PARTNERS

| Action | Key Partners | | Year to be complete or in place by: | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|
| | Lead | Partners | 2003 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 6.1 Policy and Legislation | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.1.1 Ensure the UDP and LEAPs contain adequate conservation policies and actions to protect water voles and their habitats. | CCW | CCBC EA | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 6.1.2 Seek to designate important breeding areas as SINC, SSSI or LNR. | CCW | CCBC | ✓ | | | | | | | | ✓ |
| 6.2 Site Safeguard and Management | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.2.1 Identify important areas of water vole habitat, particularly breeding sites and safeguard through management agreements. | CCBC | EA CCW GWT GLWT VWT KWT | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6.2.2 Seek to improve or create water vole habitat as opportunities arise, in particular to reduce the fragmentation of habitats in the county borough. | CCW | EA CCBC GWT GLWT KWT | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 6.2.3 Limit the use of herbicides on bankside/semi-aquatic vegetation, and provide information on best practice. Also consider the use of rodenticides. | EA | CCW | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 6.3 Species Management and Protection | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.3.1 Continue to require surveys and mitigation for planning applications potentially affecting the species. | CCBC | CCW EA | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6.3.2 Investigate the distribution of mink in the county borough. Assess whether mink controls would benefit water vole recovery/re-colonisation. | EA | CCBC CCW KWT GWT GLWT VWT | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 6.3.3 Consider a reintroduction programme once suitable habitats have been identified, further to investigation of status and distribution (6.5.1). | CCW | EA CCBC GWT GLWT | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 6.3.4 Continue to implement wildlife legislation. | Gwent Police | CCW | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

| Action | Key Partners | | Year to be complete or in place by: | | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------|---|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|
| | Lead | Partners | 2003 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 |
| 6.4 Advisory | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.4.1 Provide advice and information on water vole conservation and habitat management to key groups, including landowners, anglers, developers and farmers. | EA | VWT KWT CCBC FUW NFU GWT GLWT NAWAD | ✓ | | | | | | | | |
| 6.4.2 Develop guidance notes on the use of rodenticides in areas of known water vole activity, circulating to pest controllers, farmers and agri-businesses. | CCBC | CCW EA | | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| 6.5 Future Research and Monitoring | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.5.1 Undertake surveys to identify the distribution of water voles and mink. It may be possible to link otter, water vole and mink survey work and base a countywide survey on river care group areas. | EA | KWT river care groups VWT CCBC GWT GLWT | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 6.5.2 Continue to provide training for river care groups, and other interested groups, in identifying evidence of water vole and mink. | KWT | river care groups | ✓ | | | ✓ | | | ✓ | | |
| 6.5.3 Regularly monitor known key sites/colonies of water voles annually. | EA | KWT | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6.5.4 Support the setting up of a local record centre for south Wales, and seek to establish a database for information. | CBP | VWT | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6.6 Communications and Publicity | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 6.6.1 Raise public awareness of the water vole in the county borough, their decline and the need for conservation. | CBP | - | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |