

Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*)



Water Voles are a species which is being brought back from the brink of extinction by firstly protection them and secondly by reintroduction. These methods work but firstly we need to know how many there are in the Black Bourn. They are important as a species which indicates the quality of the river water and the wider environment. There were a number of reasons why their numbers plummeted, mink released from fur farms; disturbance from dredging, bank protection; tree removal; drainage; human interference; run off from farms and industry; etc.

Before we can protect them we need to know if they are present. To do this we need those with access to the river banks to put small rafts in the water which the Voles like to use as a latrine and feeding station. The rafts, made of plywood and foam insulation, should be anchored into the river bank using bamboo canes and/or a piece of cord. Apples placed on top are known to entice the furry mammals to investigate. Water voles like to sit and eat in the same place, so piles of nibbled grass and stems may be left. Plants nibbled by water voles have a distinctive 45 degree, angled-cut at the ends. 'Latrines' of rounded, cigar-shaped droppings are also tell-tale signs of water vole activity.

For domestic properties one raft per house should be sufficient. For larger sites approx one per 100m. Make sure the rafts are placed in the water with care. If you use a stake or bamboo cane to fix the raft to the bank or edge do make sure that it does not damage any Water Vole tunnels in the bank. They will usually have more than one entrance at different levels and often with plants in front of them. To see if and where you already have them you could take a photo of the bank with a phone on a selfie stick, use a mirror on a stick, view from the other side of the river if you have access or you may have a fixed object on the bank to which you can tie the raft. The raft should be close to the bank and in or close to vegetation

The best time for observing activity is Spring and Summer up to and including October after which the rafts should be taken out for the winter. If left in they will deteriorate and could be cast adrift causing litter and problems elsewhere. They can be replaced in early April.

If you are lucky and see droppings like in the picture or plant stalks cut at 45 degrees then please let greenixworth.org.uk know where and when you saw their droppings, or waste food. If you can forward a picture of the raft, so much the better, then we can enter the information on our map of the river to which the public will have access. If you are happy for the citizen scientist's name to be put on the map then please let us have that. We can then pass on the location of the voles to

Water voles are protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) (as amended). *“It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take a water vole; possess or control a live or dead water vole; intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which water voles use for shelter or protection, or disturb water voles using such a place”*. Water voles are also [listed as rare and most threatened species](#) under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)



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