



## **Do I need a licence to survey for water voles?**

The water vole has suffered a drastic decline in previous years which has been attributed to habitat fragmentation and predation by mink. Undertaking surveys to detect water vole presence along water courses can aid our understanding of this species and help improve conservation measures as well as providing up to date information on water vole presence before any developmental works. Surveys for water voles can normally be carried out without the need for a licence.

To determine whether a licence is necessary you need to consider whether you are likely to commit an action which is otherwise illegal. The legal protection for water voles is described below. If you propose to undertake surveys which will result in intentional disturbance to water voles then you will need to apply for a licence from Natural England. Licence application forms from Natural England can be downloaded from the Natural England website:

[www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/licences/applicationforms.aspx](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/licences/applicationforms.aspx)

### **Legal protection for Water voles**

From the 6<sup>th</sup> April 2008 water voles became subject to increased legal protection and are now fully covered by the provisions of section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Legal protection makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take water voles
- Possess or control live or dead water voles or derivatives
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose
- Sell water voles or offer or expose for sale or transport for sale
- Publish or cause to be published any advertisement which conveys the buying or selling of water voles.

Licences are available from Natural England to allow activities that would otherwise be an offence, including:

- For scientific or educational purposes:
- For the purposes of ringing or marking
- For conserving wild animals or introducing them into a particular areas.
- Preserving public health or public safety
- Preventing the spread of disease
- Preventing serious damage to any form of property or to fisheries

Water voles are not listed on the European Habitats Directive 1992 and so are not protected by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. A licence is therefore not required under the Regulations.

### **Surveying for water voles**

Direct sightings of water voles are rare. Most surveys therefore rely on the occurrence of characteristic field signs such as faeces, latrines, feeding stations, burrows and footprints in order to detect their presence along water courses.

The following operations do not, in the view of Natural England, require a licence as no offence is committed;

- Walking river banks or wading along the watercourse to look for field signs of water voles. This could include walking past known burrow entrances and carrying out a brief exterior examination. Care should be taken not to trample water vole habitat and burrows and thereby cause disturbance.
- Stopping to examine potential water voles burrows (as there is no intention of disturbing a water vole). However, if a water vole is seen or appears to be present you should withdraw immediately.
- Watching a known burrow from a distance or from concealment to see if it is occupied, providing there is no intention of disturbing the water voles.

Detailed and prolonged examination of a known water vole burrow which would cause disturbance to any water voles present would require a licence. Such activities would include intrusive methods i.e. using probes inside the burrow or remaining at the burrow once there is good reason to believe that a water vole is present. Any work which involves catching or handling water voles will require a licence.

### **For further information relating to water vole surveying, please refer to:**

Strachan, R. & Moorhouse, T.(2006) Water vole conservation handbook (2nd ed.). Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, Oxford, 132pp. ISBN 0 9546376 4 X. Note that this handbook pre-dates the increased legal protection for water voles.

### **For licensing enquiries contact:**

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