



Water Vole

Biodiversity Action Plan

A Wildthings Species Action Plan
2006–2010

Action Plan

Introduction

The water vole is Britain's largest vole, easily recognised by its hairy tail, rounded face and body, and short ears that extend just beyond the fur. It is a skilled swimmer and it requires suitable banks for burrowing and a good fringe of riparian vegetation that provides food and cover. Slow-moving rivers, streams, ditches and ponds are favoured sites. Breeding occurs between April and September in underground tunnels, and a female water vole may have as many as five litters a year, each with five young. The national decline of the water vole has led to its partial protection under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 whereby it is now an offence to damage or destroy, or obstruct access to, any of the habitats which the voles use for shelter, or to disturb the animals whilst they are occupying such habitats. This legislation has been further strengthened by the Countryside & Rights of Way Act 2000. The water vole is being considered for addition to parts of Schedule 9 of the WCA 1981.





Current status and distribution

Water voles were formally widespread and common in the lowland regions of Britain but the population has suffered a long-term decline since 1900. It is Britain's fastest declining mammal. Two national surveys carried out by the Vincent Wildlife Trust in 1989-90 and 1996-98 have shown that this decline has now developed into a serious population crash with a reduction in population by 88% in only seven years. It is predicted that by the year 2000 there will have been a 94% loss in numbers of water voles. In Bath and North East Somerset populations are known to be on the Kennet and Avon Canal.

Current factors causing loss or decline

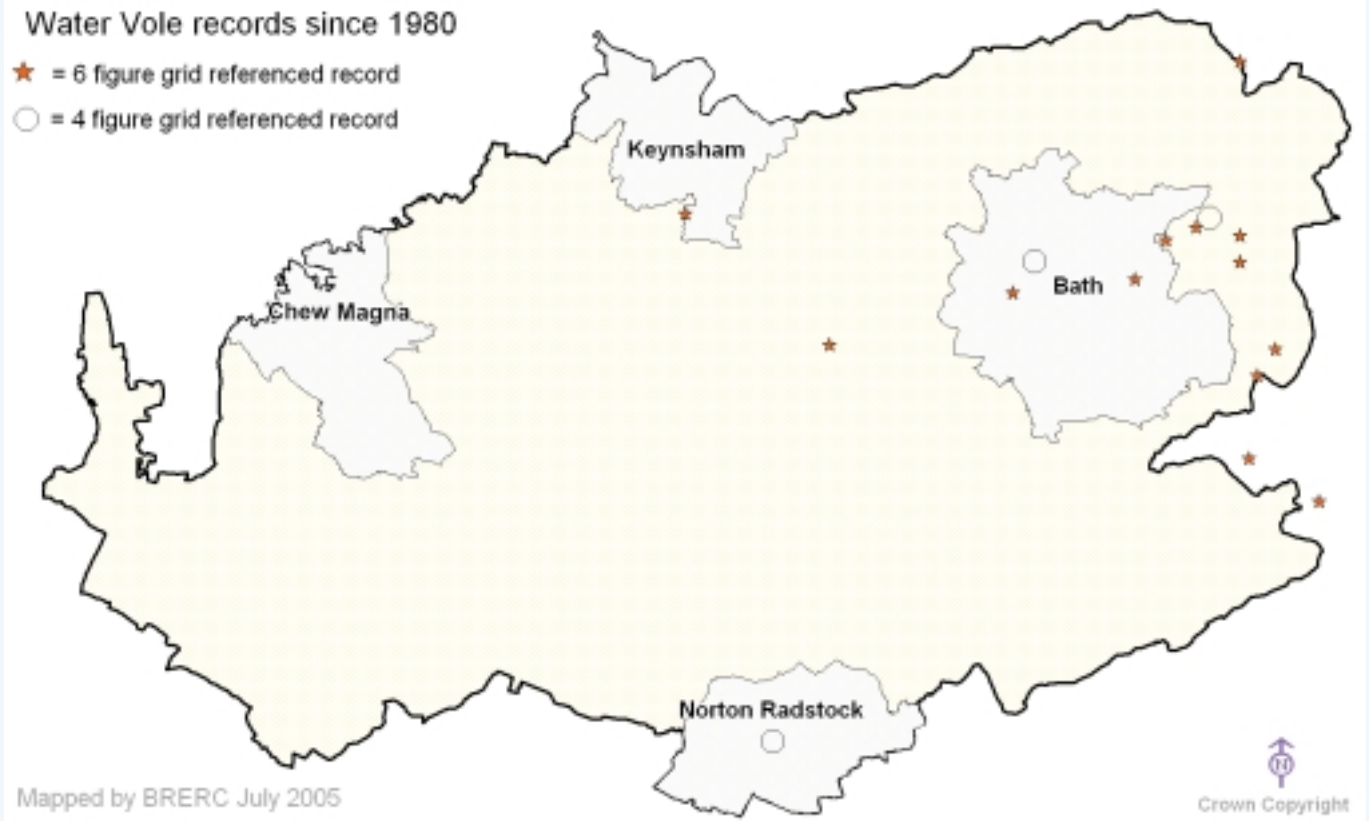
- Habitat loss due to development
- Habitat fragmentation
- Habitat degradation
- Exclusion and predation by mink
- Bank protection works

Current Action in Bath and North East Somerset

The water vole is one of the priority species identified by the Wild things partnership, Wessex Water's Biodiversity Action Plan and the Avon BAP. It is also a key species for British Waterways.



Distribution map



Action plan objectives

- 1 Identify all populations within the Bath and North East Somerset area
- 2 Halt the decline of the water vole in Bath and North East Somerset
- 3 Enhance, restore and create water vole habitat
- 4 Encourage sympathetic habitat management
- 5 Update the records held by the Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre for water voles
- 6 Monitor mink populations
- 7 Inform and involve local communities in understanding water voles



Proposed actions with lead agencies

Action	Lead	Objectives	Measurable Outputs	Target Date
A. Undertake systematic survey of the water vole in B&NES	AWT (funding dependant) EA	1,5	Up to date information to be used by Partnership to further water vole conservation in B&NES	By 2008
B. Provide advice to riparian landowners on habitat management	AWT EA EN B&NES FWAG	2,3,4,7	Additional optimal habitat for water voles, raised awareness amongst landowners	On-going
C. Increase public awareness	AWT B&NES EA	2,5,7	More records of sightings generated by raised awareness, greater appreciation of plight of water vole	2006 onwards
D. Ensure appropriate habitat management and protection of water vole colonies through planning and the Environment Agency consenting process	EA EN B&NES AWT	2,3,4	Planning gain of habitat for water vole, greater awareness within planning authority and agencies of legal status of water vole, habitat enhancement	2006
E. Assess mink population and determine threat from mink through existing records for B&NES	EA AWT BRERC	2,6	Up to date information re mink populations in B&NES, formulation of strategy for protecting water vole populations	By 2007
F. Produce list of priority species & habitat associations	BRERC	4,7	Educational and promotional material	2006
G. Identify sites for possible re-introduction	BRERC EA	2,3	Sites identified for possible re-introductions	By 2010
H. Develop strategy to protect and extend water vole distribution in B&NES	B&NES EA	2,3,4	Habitat improvements and stable / increasing water vole populations	By 2008
I. Work in partnership with all relevant parties to produce cohesive strategy for the K & A Canal	AWT	2,3,4,5,7	Increased partnership working Improved habitat management	2006

AWT – Avon Wildlife Trust

B&NES – Bath & North East Somerset Council

BRERC – Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre

EA – Environment Agency

FWAG – Farming Wildlife Advisory Group

Wildthings – Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership for the B&NES area