



# NORFOLK MINK PROJECT

Annual Newsletter 1, January – December 2013



**Norfolk  
Non-native  
Species  
Initiative**



## 2013 STATISTICS

**Total Mink Killed** 185

**Rafts Deployed\*** 437

**Traps Deployed\*** 606  
\*By the end of the year

## A New Year a Renewed Project

This is the first of a new series of annual Newsletters to help keep those involved with the Project up to date with what has happened over the past year. The Project has changed but first, on behalf of the Project, we must say a huge thank you to all those who have been involved with the Mink Project over the years. The Project is only possible because of your commitment and financial support from our partners.

The Project Steering Group has a new Chair in myself, also a volunteer. My background is a lifetime working in wildlife management, including 15 years as part of the scientific team behind the eradication of coypus from Britain. As some of you will know, The Norfolk Mink Project started in 2003; primarily to help halt the catastrophic decline in the water vole population caused by introduced American mink (*Neovison vison*). After an initial focus on the River Wensum, the Project was expanded to the Broads and the River Nar. Now, using the experience gained, the Project has embarked on a new control strategy (it can be found at <http://www.norfolkdiversity.org/nonnativespecies/publications.aspx>). The aim is to reduce mink population densities to very low levels throughout the entire county.

Funding for The Project comes from modest contributions from a range of bodies such as Norfolk County Council, the Environment Agency, The Water Management Alliance, the Broads Authority, the SITA Trust (through the levy on landfill) and work in one catchment is currently supported by the EU. The lead partner is currently Norfolk County Council, where the lead officer is Mike Sutton-Croft. Mike is supported by a Steering Group of key partners and wildlife management specialists.

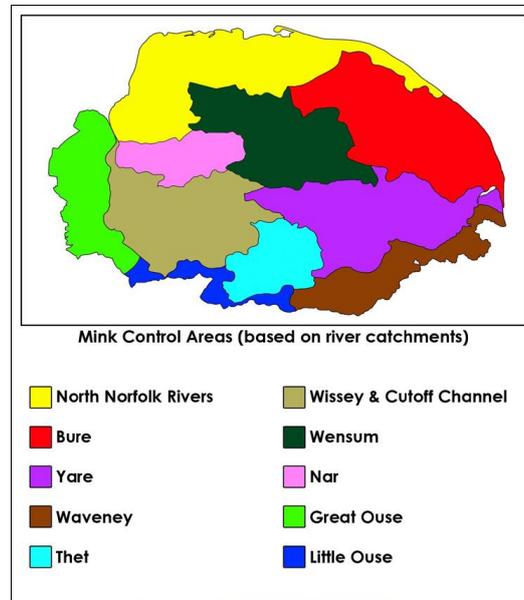
The expansion of the Project makes all trapping more effective by reducing immigration from un-trapped areas as well as improving protection for water voles. This is needed as their population has fallen by 90% since the 1970's and possibly by 20% since 2011. Control of mink also provides important protection for vulnerable waterfowl and game interests. The expansion of the Project has meant we need to find new sources of funds and that search is ongoing.

I hope you find this Newsletter interesting and my thanks again for all your support.

Simon Baker  
Chair of the Norfolk Mink Project Steering Group

## CATCHMENTS

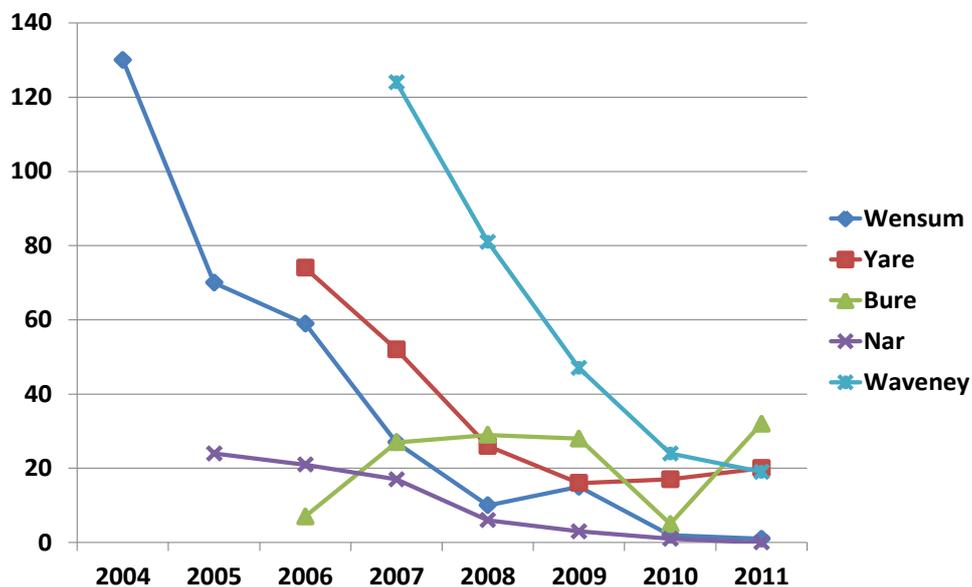
For control purposes, Norfolk has been divided into ten river catchments. Within these, monitoring for mink and trapping is undertaken by volunteers with support from 4 part time co-ordinators Paul Gambling, Stephen Mace, Rory Hart and Penny Hemphill. The Catchments are:



## PROGRESS: 2003 - 2011

The graph below shows the good progress that has been made in those Catchments where we have been trapping for some years. Mink kills per year fell with a steady trapping effort.

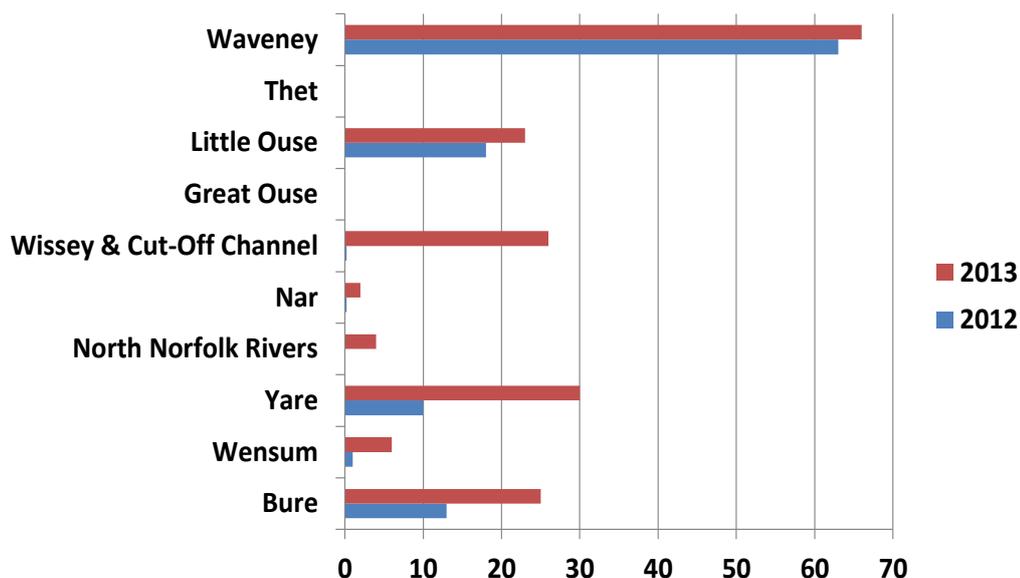
Number of mink killed annually, by catchment.



As you can see from the figure below, showing progress over the past 2 years, numbers of mink killed have risen in all catchments between 2012 and 2013. However, we have been very successful in maintaining the low population density in the Nar and the Wensum catchments. It is proving more challenging to reduce the population in the more extensive wetlands of the Yare, Bure and Waveney, although numbers are well down on pre trapping levels. We anticipate that our new strategy of developing trapping across the whole county should help reduce immigration from un-trapped into previously trapped areas.

To help highlight the relative mink status in each catchment we have introduced a 'Traffic Light' status for catchments. We currently have 4 catchments at red, 3 at amber and 2 at green. We are not yet doing sufficient trapping within the Thet catchment to feel confident that we can assess it properly, although we know of 1 mink killed there in 2013. Catchment status is shown at the top of the Catchment Reports that follow.

**Numbers of mink killed annually, by catchment, since 2012**



## CATCHMENT REPORTS

### BURE AND YARE

**Stephen Mace**  
07920 522054 macey@stephenmace.co.uk

#### MINK KILL & STATUS 2013

**Bure**      **25**      

**Yare**      **30**      

#### **Bure**

There were a total of twenty five mink caught in the Bure catchment in 2013. The central

and eastern parts of the catchment were the most active with hot spots at Hickling, Martham, Ingham, Catfield and around Salhouse. Perhaps the most notable was Hickling where ten mink were caught within a few weeks. Please keep vigilant, especially anywhere close to the broads, since the habitat is ideal for mink. Also many areas are hard to access, which may result in repopulation that can go unnoticed for a time. North and west of Aylsham could do with a little more coverage, so if you know anyone who might be interested, please contact me.



*Mink capture at Martham (S Mace)*



*Capture using 'Mink Police' (P Gambling) – see Mike Sutton-Croft's end-piece*

## Yare

A total of thirty mink were caught in the Yare catchment in 2013, with several sightings helping to pinpoint the populations. The lower Yare has been very quiet compared to the upper Yare, which has seen most of the activity for this catchment. Large numbers of mink were caught from Bawburgh Lakes to Marlingford and a few from Thorpe to Strumpshaw. Fewer mink than before are now upstream at Barford and Colton. We are continuing to expand trapping effort in the upper Yare, with good coverage now established from Cringleford to Barnham Broom. We are looking for people to monitor rafts anywhere upstream from Coston to Shipdham, Wrampingham to Wymondham, and from Loddon to Wymondham so please contact us if you are, or know anyone who might be, interested.

The River Tas has seen the very high mink numbers of five years ago drop in 2013 to the point where only one sighting has been reported. This may be linked to the loss of two key monitoring sites but new and existing sites have not yet detected any mink so this appears to be a genuine reduction in numbers.

## NORTH NORFOLK RIVERS

Rory Hart

07950 555279 roryhart@ymail.com

**MINK KILL & STATUS 2013**

**North Norfolk**

**4**



Rivers in the north of the county, although rather smaller than the major catchments in the county, do support important populations of wildlife that can be threatened by the presence of mink. In January 2013 the rivers that flow through north Norfolk were added to the existing areas where monitoring/trapping was already taking place. Over the year, a network of 20 organisations and land owners have agreed to act as volunteer monitors using 30 sets of equipment supplied by the project. The range of volunteers includes conservation organisations, sporting estates and farmers. A further group of 20 individuals have also been recruited in an information gathering role, whereby they specifically request any 'mink

news' from their contacts and report information to me monthly.

Volunteers have reported that mink activity in the region was rare but their motivation to support the project has been very high. We have used conventional 'raft' type equipment on larger water bodies but land based tunnel systems have also been deployed where streams are smaller and rafts less appropriate. Monitoring results have very much supported the assumption that mink are infrequent or more probably very localised in the north of the county. No conclusive footprints or sighting of mink have been reported although the habitat does appear highly suitable for American mink so the low abundance is interesting. The importance of game shooting locally and its associated history of predator control may explain why mink populations have not developed as widely as elsewhere.

The winter period has been very trying for many of the coastal monitor sites with severe storms changing habitat from fresh to salt water, washing away and smashing equipment. The project is still trying to assess the impact of the severe weather and re-supply materials as necessary.

Over the next months the project will hope to develop more information by encouraging deployment of the live catch traps into the monitoring rafts where daily checking routine is achievable and developing links with fishery managers who have a particular interest in looking for mink. Volunteers will also be asked to record the presence or absence of water vole on their sites because the two species rarely co-exist.

## WENSUM, NAR AND WISSEY

**Paul Gambling**

07899 756107 [wildlife@paulgambling.com](mailto:wildlife@paulgambling.com)

### MINK KILL & STATUS 2013

<b>Wensum</b>	<b>8</b>	
<b>Nar</b>	<b>2</b>	
<b>Wissey</b>	<b>26</b>	

Support for the project areas on the Wensum and Nar was on hold for a few months at the beginning of 2013, while waiting for further funding. This meant a hiatus in installing new and replacing old rafts and traps but trapping and monitoring continued at lower levels across most of the areas. Severe floods in the winter of 2012-13 resulted in the first significant damage to and loss of rafts since the project began, many of which have now been replaced.

#### **Wensum**

Overall, mink are largely under control on the Wensum but there have been occasional incursions throughout the catchment especially in the Fakenham area, North Elmham, Lyng, Lenwade and there is a regular presence at Costessey. The River Tud appears to be mink free at the moment with no sightings reported in recent years.

However, there may be more mink than we are aware of, since monitoring has been much reduced in recent years, largely due to the very low numbers of mink caught and an understandable drop in enthusiasm. There is now little or no monitoring upstream of Sculthorpe, or on the Wendling Beck, Blackwater (Reephram area), Whitewater (Gressenhall). However, given the pattern in other areas it is very likely that a few mink have made it back in and we are looking to recruit anyone in those areas with a renewed interest in monitoring for a year or more using rafts.

## **Nar**

The upper reaches of the River Nar have been largely mink free now for several years with only very occasional incursions, mainly detected and dealt with around West Acre. It's not clear where these mink are entering the river system given the absence of any detections upstream and downstream, but mink are capable of travelling long distances away from water

## **Wissey**

The project started in 2012 with a survey of water voles in the River Wissey catchment, in order to establish where water voles were present and in what numbers. Since water voles are highly susceptible to predation by mink, the survey provides a guide both to where mink might be, and to where their numbers are low enough not to impact significantly the numbers of water voles and other vulnerable wildlife. Mink and otter signs were also recorded and showed the presence of mink in several areas where they were not expected. The survey was funded by the EU RINSE project and there is a summary report in Norfolk Bird and Mammal Report 2012.

A number of people have trapped mink in the past in the Wissey area, though understandably many stopped when the number of mink captures dwindled to near zero. Unfortunately, reports of mink have started to increase again in recent years and the survey suggested widespread mink presence, so catchment-wide mink monitoring and trapping started in Jan 2013, funded by the Environment Agency.

Summary of mink presence by local area, from the mouth of the Wissey to its source, since the start of the project:

### River Wissey:

*Fordham Fen -suspected. Hilgay - present and being trapped. Wisington - suspected. Stoke Ferry - seen but not caught yet. Whittington - unknown. Northwold & Didlington - one trapped, no recent signs. Mundford - detected in 2012 but not caught. STANTA - present and being trapped. Bodney-Great Cressingham - unknown. South & North Pickenham - not detected. Necton-Holme Hale-Bradenham - thought to be absent but no monitoring yet.*

### Tributaries:

*Methwold Lode - not detected. Barton Bendish-Boughton - several trapped, no recent signs. River Gadder - thought to be absent currently. Watton Brook: Little Cressingham - unknown. Watton - unknown. Thompson Stream - present and being trapped.*

### Cut-Off Channel:

*Fordham - present but no trappers. Wretton - unknown as no monitoring yet. Methwold Hythe - present and being trapped. Feltwell - present and being trapped.*

### Fens:

*Southery - unknown. Methwold Severals & Fens - present and being trapped. Feltwell-Hockwold area - present and being trapped.*



*Mink scat (dropping) by the side of a pond, with an oak leaf for scale.*

## WAVENEY AND LITTLE OUSE

Penny Hemphill

01473 890089 pennyhemphill@suffolkwildlifetrust.org

<b>MINK KILL &amp; STATUS 2013</b>	<b>Waveney</b>	<b>66</b>	
	<b>Little Ouse</b>	<b>23</b>	

Control of mink along most of the River Waveney and the Little Ouse is carried out by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust working in collaboration with the Norfolk Mink Project. As mink are no respecters of county boundaries close co-operation between neighbouring counties is essential.

### Waveney

There are currently 44 trappers using 65 mink rafts and traps along the Waveney. The numbers vary as some trappers leave the project and new trappers join the project during the year. It would appear that upstream of Harleston it is relatively free of mink, with no mink trapped for the last two years. The mink were trapped from Mendham downstream to Oulton Marshes where one trapper caught 17 mink. You will see from the first chart in this newsletter that it seemed we were getting on top of the mink numbers, however in 2012 and 2013 trapping rates increased once more so please keep trapping!

### Little Ouse

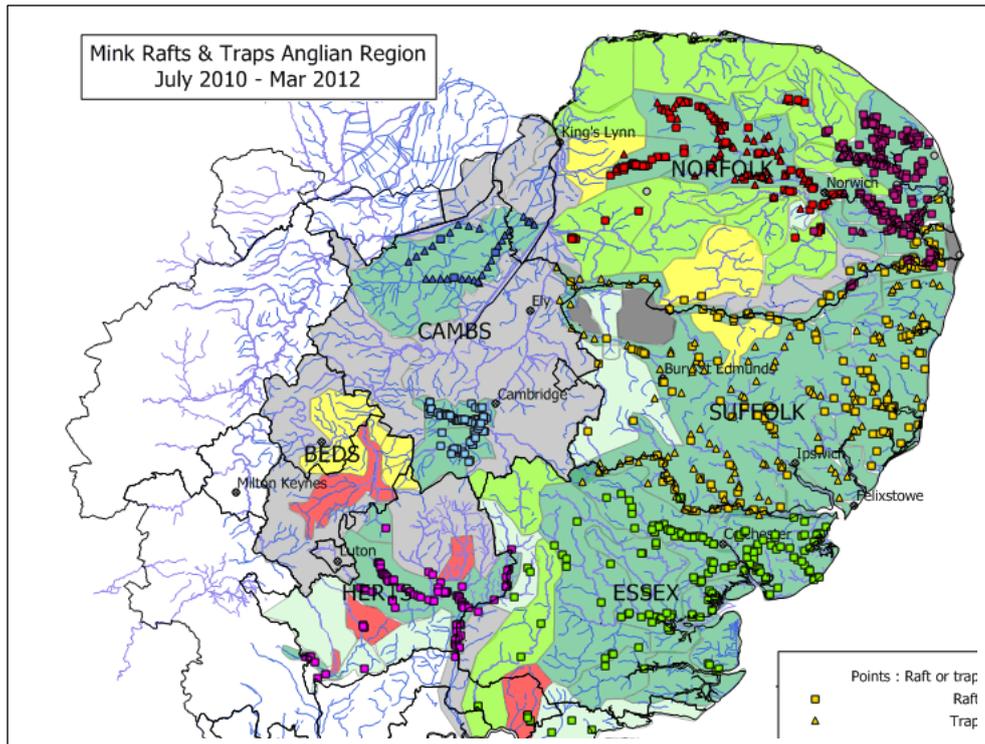
Trapping rates along this river has been up and down over the years with an increase in 2013 with 23 mink trapped. There are a total of 14 trappers using 15 rafts – some trappers along this river are using their own trapping equipment and supplying us with their results. This river is targeted for an increase in mink control in 2014 especially along the 11km stretch owned by the Forestry Commission.

## Plans for 2014 – Mike Sutton Croft

We are planning to further expand our coverage of Norfolk by starting to trap in the Great Ouse Catchment during 2014. We are also planning more trapping along the Waveney and Lower Yare, thanks to support from the Waveney, Lower Yare and Lowthingland IDB, which has recently joined those organisations supporting us.

The Project is also making use of technology where it can support our work. The co-ordinators are trialling 'Mink Police', devices attached to traps that allow them to remotely monitor any captures via a mobile phone. So far they seem a promising addition to our 'toolkit' but, as usual, the challenge will be to find the funds to purchase some units.

To help us co-ordinate our data recording more effectively we are developing a 'Cloud' database, with help from EU funding via the RINSE Project (Reducing the Impacts of Non-native Species in Europe). This will allow our co-ordinators to enter their data remotely and make it easier to analyse. We also hope to set up a Project website over the coming year to help us keep you all better informed on what is going on in the Project and to provide a source of reference material. We are currently looking for a suitable volunteer to help us get it up and running!



Whilst we concentrate on Norfolk, we also liaise closely with others working on mink control in the east and are members of the Eastern Region Mink Control Group. This helps us share best practice and, by encouraging control over a wide area, helps reduce immigration from areas outside the county. The map above shows the extent of mink trapping across the Eastern Region and the distribution of trapping in Norfolk before we started our new Strategy.

Finally, a sincere thank you from all of us to our funders, supporters and those who carry out the trapping, for enabling us to protect water voles, wildlife and game interests across the county.

Mike Sutton-Croft  
Project Leader, Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative

