

Wetlands for Water Voles & People Project

Herts &
Middlesex



Water Vole Survey Newsletter 2009

Introduction

Water vole surveys have been carried out at river and wetland monitoring sites in Hertfordshire from 2004 to 2009. Monitoring sites are typically a 500m section of river that is surveyed for its entire length for signs of water voles. Of 125 monitoring sites, 119 have been surveyed during this time of which 26 (or 22%) have shown positive signs of water vole presence. An additional 13 sites were surveyed between April and August 2009.

2009 Water Vole Survey Results

Of the 45 sites surveyed in 2009, both monitoring sites and others, 5(11%) had signs that water voles were definitely present. Of the rest, 14 (31%) had some signs of vole activity, usually feeding signs, but no latrines. As field voles can leave similar feeding signs to water voles these sites are considered to be possible but unconfirmed water vole sites. The remaining 26 (58%) sites had no signs of water vole presence.

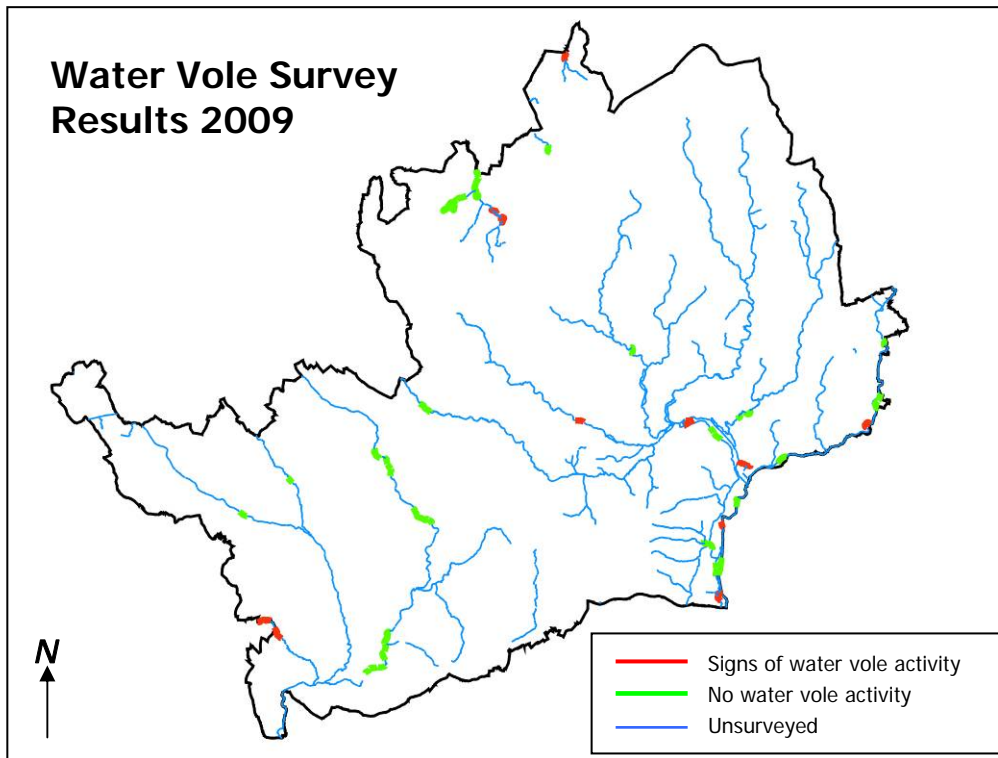
Water vole strongholds are shown to be present on the River Mimram, River Chess and River Purwell and in the Lower Lea Valley south of Hertford. Water voles are also present on the River Rhee along the Bedfordshire border and may be hanging on in the upper River Lea.

Mink Control

One of the most significant factors in the drastic decline of water vole numbers across Britain has been predation by mink. Mink control schemes have been implemented by the Hertfordshire Water Vole Project in key areas for water voles since the winter of 2004. The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) have also been running a successful mink control scheme on the River Chess, upstream from the M25, since 2003. Water vole numbers on the River Chess have increased since mink control was introduced and it is vital that mink populations continue to be monitored and controlled across Hertfordshire if water voles are to survive and prosper.

Habitat Management Recommendations

Even where Water vole numbers were found to be high, the populations could increase if the habitat were to be managed more sympathetically. Water voles need marginal, emergent vegetation to provide food and cover. These conditions are reduced where cattle or horses have access to the edge of the water and graze and trample the banks. Fencing of the river bank can reduce this, although un-grazed banks allow trees to establish. Significant stretches of rivers in Hertfordshire are unsuitable for water voles as a result of shading from trees, which prevents the growth of marginal vegetation. The thinning of trees along river banks would not only allow existing water vole populations to increase, but would also aid the dispersal of these populations to areas currently without water voles.



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Contact Details

If you would like more information about the surveys, mink control or habitat management for water voles please get in touch.

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Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those landowners who gave us access to their land for the 2009 survey and to all the volunteers who contributed to the surveying.

This year our survey team led by Martin Ketcher included: Sian Gibson, Glyn Holt, Pam Prtak and Ric Sandifer

The Wetlands for Water Voles & People Project is a partnership of Environment Agency, Lee Valley Regional Park Authority, British Waterways, the Herts Biological Records Centre and the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. The partnership is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

