

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate use

Ratty returns after 13 year absence

The water vole, most famously characterised by the author Kenneth Grahame as ‘Ratty’ in *Wind of the Willows*, has set up home once again on the River Beane for the first time since 1997 thanks to the efforts of Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) and local people.

Wetlands for Water Voles Project Manager Alison O’Dea, who made the discovery at Beane Marsh near Hertford during a monitoring programme carried out by the Trust, says: “We were thrilled to find that the water vole has returned to this area after being absent for so long. It is a testament to the work that the Trust has been doing to protect water voles in the county and to the efforts of the local community.”

Conservation work by the Trust in partnership with local people over the last six years has brought the species back from the brink of extinction in Hertfordshire and there are now stable water vole populations on the Rivers Mimram, Lea, Chess and Purwell. The return of water voles to the River Beane indicates that the animals may have moved up the river from important sites in Hertford, such as the Trust’s Kings Meads Nature Reserve, where habitat works funded by the Environment Agency and mink control have protected an important core population. Mink control carried out on the River Beane over the past three years by local people has meant that the river is now a safe refuge for water voles.

The UK’s water vole population suffered a dramatic decline across the country particularly in the 1990s, due mainly to the rise of the non-native mink, which escaped or was released from fur farms. Intensive farming methods have also contributed to the decline in the water vole’s habitat.

HMWT Chief Executive Judy Adams says: “Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust is working not only to preserve existing habitats for threatened species like the water vole but to connect habitats like these together in a landscape-wide vision, to ensure wildlife has enough room to flourish in the future.”



Herts & Middlesex

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Notes for editors

Water voles

The water vole population has decreased by around 90% in the last century, making it the fastest declining mammal in the UK. Often mistaken for rats, there are some key differences – water voles have rounded faces, small ears and brown fur covering their paws, ears and tail. They usually grow to around 14-22cm, with a tail of around 9-14cm. It's thought the return of otters could help the water vole population to recover, as the otter hunts mink. Water voles have now been given national protection and have been identified as a priority species for action in both the Hertfordshire and Lee Valley Biodiversity Action Plans.

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) is a charity dedicated to protecting wildlife for future generations. It safeguards and manages 44 nature reserves across the two counties and is at the forefront of developing long-term nature conservation strategies. It has over 21,000 members and is one of 47 local Wildlife Trusts across the UK.

Wetlands for Water Voles Project in Hertfordshire

Supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust are co-ordinating efforts to conserve existing populations of water voles in Hertfordshire. People can get involved with the project in a number of ways – whether it's helping to carry out surveys to track populations, ensuring their pond is water vole friendly or simply showing support by [adopting a water vole](#)! More information is available at <http://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk/Wildlife/watervole>

River Beane and surrounding area

The River Beane runs between Stevenage and Hertford for approximately 11 miles. Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust manage a number of nature reserves in the Hertford area including King's Meads, Waterford Heath, Amwell, Willowmead, Balls Wood and Hertford Heath. For more on the nature reserves and local wildlife visit www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk

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