

NEWS RELEASE

23 September 2009

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For immediate use

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Wildlife Trust Creates More Chances to See Water Voles in Hertfordshire

One of Britain's most endangered mammals has been encouraged to thrive in the Hertfordshire thanks to the County's leading wildlife conservation organisation. Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (HMWT) has been carrying out habitat works at its Frogmore Meadows Nature Reserve (NR), near Chenies and Tewinbury Nature Reserve near Welwyn Garden City, to benefit water voles and to make it easier for people to watch them. Both of these projects have been made possible thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund

Habitat loss and predation by the non-native American mink have both had disastrous effects on water vole populations, which have declined by about 90% in the last 40 years.

Water voles make their homes along rivers, ditches, ponds and streams so at Frogmore Meadow NR the Trust has created and restored ponds that will increase habitat for these endearing little creatures. These additional water bodies will also provide more habitat for a range of other wetland animals including frogs, diving beetles and dragonflies. In addition, a short path and viewing platform now leads off the Chess Valley walk, allowing fantastic views of the River Chess and the restored pond and its wildlife and increasing access to the site.

At Tewinbury NR HMWT will be removing scrub which is encroaching on the wetland -benefitting water voles as well as the other wildlife that uses the site. People will also benefit as HMWT will be installing a new, two-storey hide with improved access for those with mobility challenges – enabling them to get closer to wildlife.

The new hide replaces an existing hide which has become dilapidated and is not easily accessible. The new hide will accommodate 16 people and an access ramp to an elevated view-point will provide greater views over the top of the reed beds for all visitors. The hide has been designed by HMWT staff using the specialist training and insight they were given by the Fieldfare Trust, an organisation which promotes countryside access for disabled people.

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Herts & Middlesex

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President - SA Bowes-Lyon, PCA

Alison Hauser, HMWT's Wetlands Awareness Officer said "We already know that water voles use the river corridors at both Frogmore Meadow and Tewbury NRs but the work we have done through the Heritage Lottery Funding will enable us to make room for more of them as well as giving people the opportunity to get closer views of them. We are looking forward to hearing reports of water voles seen swimming across the river or chomping vegetation at the pond's edge and we hope more and more people will tell us they've spotted one of our most endangered residents!"

The works on the two reserves are being carried out as part of a three year HLF Project, 'Wetlands for Water Voles and People', co-ordinated by HMWT. The wildlife conservation charity received £399,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to carry out conservation work for water voles throughout Hertfordshire. Frogmore Meadows and Tewbury nature reserves are two of five wetland havens in Hertfordshire that will benefit from the HLF grant through habitat improvements for water voles and access improvements for local people.

Anyone interested in finding out the Wetland for Water Voles project or more about the Trust's work in general, should visit HMWT's web site at www.wildlifetrust.org.uk/herts or call 01727 858901.

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Notes for Editors

- 1. The Wetlands for Water Voles and People Project is working throughout Hertfordshire and the Colne Valley to conserve and improve water vole numbers. Habitat and public access works are focussed on five wetland haven: Silvermeade in Broxbourne, Cassiobury Park in Watford, Frogmore Meadow near Chenies, Purwell Ninesprings near Hitchin and Tewbury near Welwyn Garden City. The Wetlands for Water Voles and People Project is a partnership between the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency, British Waterways, Thames Water, Lee Valley Park Authority and Herts Biological Records Centre and is supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund.*
- 2. Water voles are the UK's fastest declining mammal. They are threatened by habitat loss, pollution and predation from the non-native American mink. Due to their rapid decline they have been named a UK priority species and are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act. This makes it illegal to kill a water vole or to disturb or destroy their habitat.*
- 3. Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust is a charity dedicated to protecting wildlife for future generations. It safeguards and manages 43 Nature Reserves across the two counties, advises on wider countryside issues and is at the forefront of developing long-term nature conservation strategies. It has over 18,000 members and is one of 47 local Wildlife Trusts across the UK.*

For further information, or for a Jpeg of the photograph(s) shown, please contact: Clare Gray, Marketing & PR Officer, Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust on tel. 01727 858901 or clare.gray@hmwt.org

Press Release

Date 23 September, 2009

Herts &
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Celebrating the viewing observation platform at Frogmore Meadow - Alison Hauser (HMWT), Gerald Salisbury (Volunteer Warden for Frogmore NR), Alison O'Dea (HMWT) and the HMWT Badger.



Above: A water vole- one of Britain's most endangered creatures

Right : Improved views and a new hide at Tewinbury NR will make it easier for more people to watch water voles