

# The Water Vole

## (*Arvicola terrestris*)

### Identification, signs and habitat factsheet

Herts &  
Middlesex



#### Identification



Photo: Darin Smith 2004

- Chestnut brown fur
- Body length of 14-22cm
- Long fur-covered tail of 9-14cm
- Short rounded ears
- Weight of 150-300g

#### Habitat



- Slow-flowing rivers, lakes, ditches and dykes
- Need steep banks of 70-90° for burrows
- Need banks with plenty of vegetation such as reeds, nettles and grasses

#### Field Signs



- **Tracks:** Look in mud flats close to water's edge for 4-toed foreprint and 5-toed hindprint
- **Latrines:** Deposits of faeces in small piles under bankside vegetation, are maintained from February to November
- **Faeces:** 8-12mm long and 4-5mm wide, cylindrical with blunt ends. Colour can range from green or brown to black and purple depending on what plant material is eaten. Have a putty-like texture when fresh
- **Burrows:** Burrows can be found in steep banks, entrances are usually wider than high with a diameter of 4-8cm. Entrances taper inside to the size of two fingers
- **Sounds:** Dive with a distinctive 'plop' sound

It can be easy to confuse field signs of the water vole with that of the rat, but there are differences between the two species that include the following:



- **Latrines:** Rat droppings tend to be scattered along runs, or deposited away from the water's edge
- **Faeces:** Rat droppings are larger than water vole droppings and always have a very unpleasant odour

Also be aware that sandmartin and kingfisher nest-holes may resemble vole burrows, but these are usually constructed in the upper earth of the bank, rather than close to the water.