

# Planting for water voles



Photograph by David Kjaer

**Water voles rely on bankside vegetation. It provides them with cover to hide from terrestrial and aerial predators as well as providing them with food. Water voles are almost entirely herbivorous and are known to eat over 220 different species of plants.**

## GOOD PLANTING FOR WATER VOLES

The best waterside habitats for water voles have a wide variety of flowering plants and grasses. Planting in the water, in the shallow margins of the water and on the bank can all benefit water voles.

Good assemblages of plants that water voles will eat include:

**Bankside vegetation:** Grasses (e.g. meadow grasses, cocksfoot, false oat grass), cow parsley, garlic mustard, common comfrey.

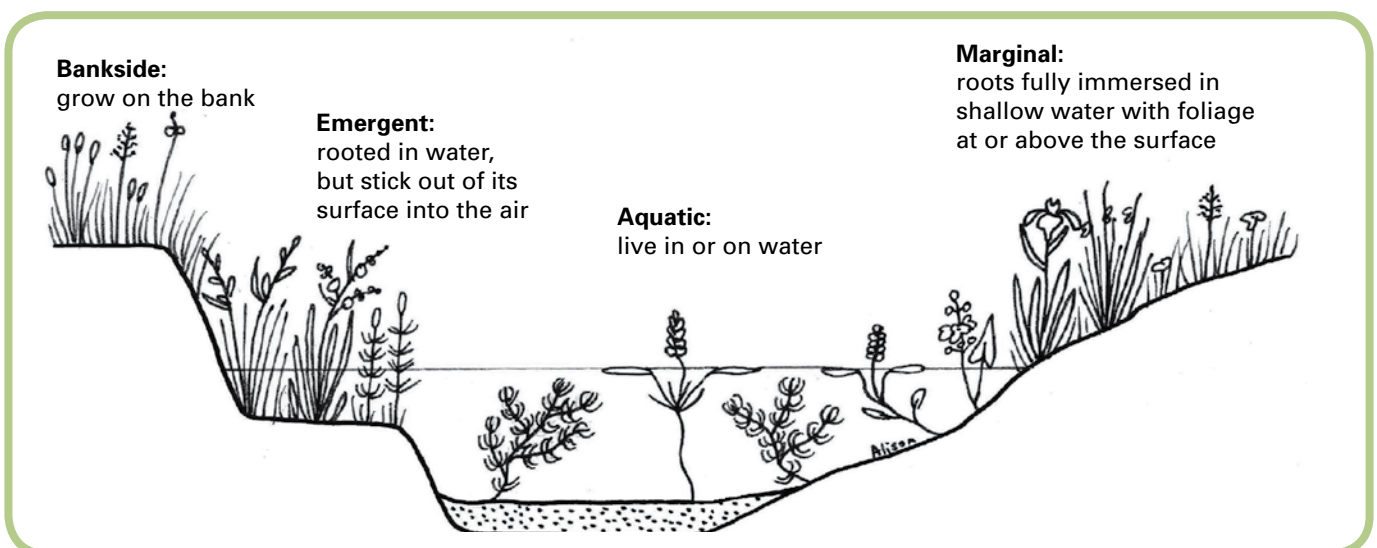
**Marginal or wetland vegetation:** Reed sweet-grass, reed canary grass, sedges (e.g. lesser and greater pond sedge), soft rush, marsh marigold, water forget-me-not,

water mint, purple loosestrife, yellow flag iris.

Warning: Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) can quickly colonise and become dominant in shallow or small waterbodies, greatly reducing the amount of open water.

**Aquatic & emergent vegetation:** Water dropwort, watercress, water crowfoot, common water plantain.

**Fruiting plants:** Occasional fruiting shrubs can provide winter food for water voles, who will eat fruit, berries, bark, rhizomes and roots when other vegetation dies back. Dog-rose, crab apple, crack-willow and bramble are all good winter food sources, although these plants should be carefully managed to prevent them from over-colonising and shading out the bank.



## WHEN SHOULD I PLANT?

The best time to plant aquatic species is mid-spring to early summer when the water begins to warm. This gives the plants the best chance to establish themselves. Using

seedlings rather than seeds gives the plants a better chance of establishing.

## PLANTS TO AVOID!

Invasive plants are those that grow so vigorously that they out-compete smaller plants. These can include native species, such as willowherb and common reed, that thrive in the right conditions but non-native plants can be a far greater problem. Several species introduced into the UK have become prevalent in our countryside, and where established are difficult to

control. Seeds of wetland plants are able to spread easily along waterways which means invasive plants can quickly establish along rivers.

Take care not to deliberately or accidentally introduce invasive plants to your wetland. It is the landowner's responsibility to deal with invasive weeds once present.

**The following seven plants are highly invasive and present in Hertfordshire:**

Floating pennywort



Himalayan balsam



Creeping water primrose



Parrot's feather



Giant hogweed



*Warning: can cause serious blisters and burns to skin*

Japanese knotweed



Australian swamp stonecrop



*Warning: can be spread by cutting*

Once an invasive plant is established in an area it is the responsibility of the landowner to control it. The correct treatment and disposal of non-native plants is essential to control existing patches and to prevent spreading further.

The Environment Agency provides advice on appropriate treatment techniques through their advisory booklet 'Managing Invasive Non-Native Plants'.

## BEFORE YOU START

Not all plants will be suitable for your site. Choose native species that grow in local rivers and wetlands to give the most natural assemblage, or check the Natural History Museum's plant postcode database to find a list of local provenance species at: [www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/plants-fungi/postcode-plants/](http://www.nhm.ac.uk/nature-online/life/plants-fungi/postcode-plants/)

By seeding your bank with a native seed mix, you may be eligible for Entry Level Stewardship funding. Check with Natural England for more details.

- It is illegal to plant or cause the spread of either Japanese Knotweed or Giant Hogweed under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.
- Contact the Environment Agency for advice on appropriate treatment and disposal of invasive plants. [www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk)
- Contact Natural England for advice before controlling invasive plants within Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)
- The Non-Native Species Secretariat provides information on identifying invasive species as well as risk assessments and details of local action groups. [www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)
- If possible, contact neighbours to alert them to the problem. Catchment treatment of invasive plants is the most successful as it reduces re-colonisation by seeds from upstream.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

**Water Vole Conservation Handbook, Second Edition (2006)**  
ISBN 0 9546376 4 X

**Managing Invasive Non-Native Plants (April 2010) Environment Agency**  
(available to download from:  
[www.environment-agency.gov.uk](http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk))

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

**For more information contact:**  
**Wetlands for Water Voles and People Project**  
Tel: 01727 858901  
Email: [water.vole@hmwt.org](mailto:water.vole@hmwt.org)  
Website: [www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk)

