



American Mink

IN THE HIGHLANDS



More information

www.gct.org.uk/uploads/minkrafthighres.pdf - a comprehensive guide to the use of mink rafts and dispatching mink caught on rafts.

www.watervolescotland.org — Cairngorms and North East Scotland water vole conservation project, using the community to run mink rafts. The biggest mink control project in the mainland UK

Hebridean Mink Project
<http://www.snh.org.uk/scottish/wisles/intro.asp>

Lochaber seabird and mink project
<http://www.snh.org.uk/press/detail.asp?id=1569>

Lure supplies
http://www.kishelscents.com/COMERSUS/store/comersus_viewitem.asp?idProduct=3272

This is one in a series of four leaflets produced by the Highland Invasive Species Forum. The others are Non-native Invasive Species in the Highlands, Japanese Knotweed, and Rhododendron.

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www.highlandbiodiversity.com

Large print version available

This project is one of 24 being undertaken in Highland with assistance from the Highland Biodiversity Partnership. It is supported by the National Lottery through the Heritage Lottery Fund, and receives match funding from Highland Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Highlands & Islands Enterprise and RSPB Scotland.



Photos by Roger Cottis, Laurie Campbell, James Merryweather & Jamie Urquhart

Originally from North America, the American mink (*Neovison vison*), was brought over to Scotland in 1938 for fur farming, the first mink escaped in the same year. Over the next two decades fur farming expanded to a peak of around one hundred units in the 1960's. This number dwindled to none by the late 1980s.

Feral mink are now known to be present in all Scottish mainland counties, except Sutherland and Caithness, and are also found on the islands of Arran, Skye and Lewis. The Hebridean Mink Project has been successful in removing the species from the Uists. The next phase aims to remove the remaining populations on Lewis and Harris.

Facts

- Mink are voracious predators, and will feed on a range of prey items.
- Mink only have one litter a year, averaging 5 young.
- Juvenile mink disperse in the autumn, and have been found to cover huge distances, up to 100km!
- If a mink is caught in a trap it is illegal to release it into the wild.
- A Mink Control Officer for the North West Highlands is in place, co-ordinating monitoring and control of mink as far south as the rivers Farrar and Beauly, initially.

Why are mink a problem?

Mink are indiscriminate predators, and survive on a wide range of native species including water voles, which have declined dramatically in the past few decades, decreasing across the UK by more than 96% since 1950. Female mink are slim enough to fit down water vole burrows, and they are also semi-aquatic and therefore competent swimmers.

As well as water voles and other small mammals, mink are also known to predate a range of bird species. Other species, not closely associated with water, are also vulnerable to mink predation and have potentially reduced in numbers as a consequence. Because they can swim well, mink are able to raid islands up to 2 miles offshore which have been set up as sanctuaries for wild birds.

In addition to a major impact on biodiversity mink may be economically damaging. There is emerging evidence that mink may have negative effects on fish farms and game birds such as grouse. Mink may also account for a large proportion of salmonid mortality in some river systems.

Mink identification

- They are a medium size carnivorous mammal with short legs and glossy dark brown fur that looks black in some light, (please note, they are occasionally found with varying coat colours). There is often a white patch under the chin, sometimes extending down towards the belly.
- Mink are frequently found near water and are often mistaken for otters, although they are significantly smaller and slimmer, females being smaller than males.
- Mink droppings smell very unpleasant. They are between 50-80mm long and 10mm thick. They are found near water and contain fur, feathers and bones.
- The toes on a mink footprint have a star shape. The toe pads and claws often merge together in a 'tear' shape, a good place to look for mink

footprints is on sandy/muddy river banks when the water level has receded.

The Law

The American mink meets criterion 2 of the SNH Species Action Framework as an invasive non native species which presents a significant risk to biodiversity. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended, makes it an offence to release mink or allow them to escape into the wild. The Mink Keeping (Scotland) Order 2003 prohibits the keeping of the species in Scotland except under licence.



Who is responsible for control in the Highlands?

There are currently some projects set up in the Highlands to control mink and monitor their movements. These are community based projects making use of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust (GWCT) designed raft. Some gamekeepers and fishing ghillies on sporting estates control mink as part of their ongoing vermin control, although this is usually restricted to their usual working area.

The best way of controlling mink and preventing them from colonising new areas, is for land owners and members of the community to work together on a catchment scale, monitoring and removing mink from the whole catchment/sub-catchment of a river system.



How are mink controlled?

Detection using a Mink raft — this consists of a tunnel with soft clay floor where the footprints of whatever has been in the tunnel can be studied. This will let you know if mink are in the area. This is considered the most effective way of controlling mink, as you are only setting traps in areas where you know mink have been recently. They only need to be checked at one or two week intervals.

Cage traps — They can be used, either mounted on a raft or dug into the bank near a watercourse. Cage traps need to be checked every 24 hours by law and excluder bars need to be fitted to exclude larger non-target species.

Spring traps — some estate workers that trap mink as a part of their ongoing vermin control use Fenn Traps. These are kill traps and need to be a mark 6 size by law for mink trapping. They should be contained in a tunnel and checked daily. There is an increased chance of trapping non-target species such as young otters or pine marten. Spring traps should not be used on mink rafts that are associated with SNH supported projects

Lure — The Hebridean mink project has successfully used mink scent lure in cage traps. This can be bought online and only a very minimal amount is needed in the trap. This avoids the use of bait; bait that is off will deter a mink from investigating a trap.

Take note

- GWCT recommend the use of an air weapon to dispatch mink caught in cage traps. An air pistol producing a muzzle velocity of 6ft/lbs or rifle of 8ft/lbs is sufficient, provided it has contact with the rear of the cranium and at a slight angle from vertical.
- The rifle at 8ft lbs is preferred and would be necessary to dispatch a verified feral ferret. Cage combs can be used to hold the mink in place in the trap to ensure a clean kill. Prometheus tipped pellets need to be used, lead pellets are not sufficient to penetrate.
- You will need to gain permission from the land owner before setting rafts on their land.
- Trapping is best done in the breeding season (Feb - April) and when juveniles are dispersing (July-September). The most efficient control is achieved when trapping takes place over large areas, especially islands and river catchments