

Scottish Mink Initiative

Working with communities to protect native wildlife



Newsletter No.2 April 2011

News bites

* **Can you help dispatch for other volunteers near you?** If you can assist with mink dispatch in your local area, please contact your Mink Control Officer.

* Remember there are stores across the project area that you can collect raft kit from. If you require new oasis, take the empty basket back and swap for one with oasis. We can then reuse the old basket.

* **Now is the spring peak for mink monitoring and trapping! ***

* *Mink on the BBC!* We had some great news coverage across the UK, and beyond, via the BBC, both on the television and on radio in January.

Events - Aberdeenshire

* Water vole and Mink field signs and survey training day at Loch of Strathbeg, **Friday 29th April, 2pm**. Please email Sarah Atkinson if you would like to attend.

Spring Has Sprung!



The new team: Sarah Atkinson, Ann-Marie MacMaster, Cat Robinson, Hollie Walker and Gunnar Scholtz .

Welcome to the new look newsletter! Over the past few months there have been some changes to the project including the welcoming of four new members of staff.

Sarah Atkinson will continue working in Aberdeenshire, alongside three new Mink Control Officers, to expand the mink control work across the north of Scotland. We also have a new Project Co-ordinator to oversee the day to day running of the project.

Helen Gray has moved on to pastures new, after 4 years as Project Officer for the Cairngorms Water Vole Project and then the interim project controlling mink in Northern Scotland. Helen said "I am leaving to further my new gundog training initiative and to give myself more time to do ecological contract work. I will miss all my volunteers who have worked so hard for the project and given up their time to help safeguard the beautiful river systems in Northern Scotland and I would like to say a big thank you to you all. I hope that the work will continue and water voles will flourish once again in years to come. I am not stepping down completely as I will continue as a raft checking and trapping volunteer in Strathspey"



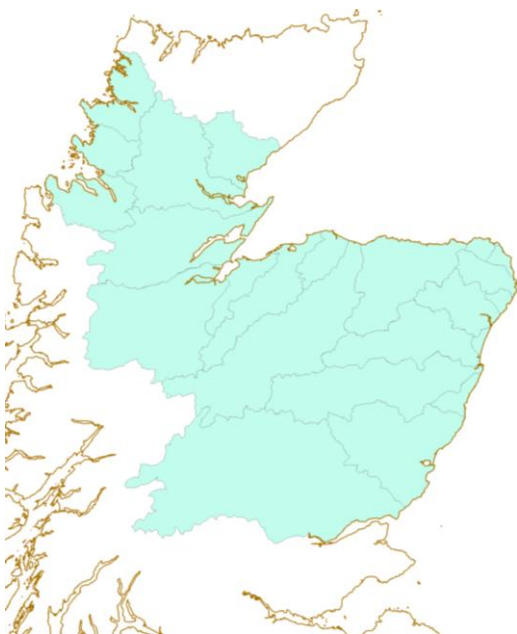
Scottish Mink Initiative

Aim: The overall aim of the Initiative is to secure multiple adjacent river catchments as areas free of breeding mink, thereby protecting nationally significant populations of water voles, salmonids, ground nesting birds and other aspects of native riparian biodiversity.

Objectives:

- To eradicate breeding mink from the project area and prevent encroachment of mink into the far north
- To ensure long term sustainable mink control in the project area through the co-ordinated and resourced transfer of responsibility for ongoing mink management to local organisations
- To raise awareness of the project as well as the benefits of a community-based and adaptive management approach to non-native species management.

We will continue to work closely with our partners at the University of Aberdeen, providing mink carcasses for scientific research, to further our knowledge of mink in Scotland.



The river catchments in blue show the area the project covers, although only northern Tayside is currently being tackled.

Back to the Future...

We have lots of great new ideas to push the Initiative forward!

* Sarah is currently developing a new website, which will provide comprehensive information on mink, water voles and the Initiative in general. In addition the University of Aberdeen and Prof. Xavier Lambin are working to develop an interactive aspect to add to the website, enabling you to see how the work you are doing as a volunteer is contributing to the overall aims of the Initiative. Both of these are exciting new developments in the Initiative, but will take some time to develop, however the current website is still active: www.watervolescotland.org

* An overall plan is to work closely with rivers and fisheries trusts, as well as a variety of other local organisations, to achieve a long term sustainable mink control program across the north of Scotland.

* We will continue to monitor water vole populations and report back on their progress!

Introducing the new team...

Hollie Walker: Project Co-ordinator

I am sure some of you already know me as the Saving Scotland's Red Squirrels Project Officer for the North East. I worked in this post for almost 2 years before applying for the position of Scottish Mink Initiative Co-ordinator; I saw this post as an ideal career progression and certainly not an opportunity I could turn down! I am originally from Worthing, West Sussex where I studied skylarks for 7 years during college and university. I have assisted in brown hyenas research and ran a game reserve research camp in South Africa, as well as with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, here in Aberdeen.

I will be based at the University of Aberdeen and will undertake the day to day running of the project, ensuring things run smoothly. I am really looking forward to putting this exciting Initiative into practice.



Highland Mink Control Officer: Gunnar Scholtz

Hello there, I'm Gunnar and I am the Mink Control Officer for the Highland Region.

I have just moved to Ullapool from the Isle of Lewis, where I've been working for the Hebridean Mink Project. I spent the last 3 years trapping mink across Lewis and Harris and many of the off-shore islands.

Previous to the mink work I was trapping for the Uist Wader Project on the Islands of North Uist and Benbecula for 5 seasons, relocating non-native hedgehogs back to the mainland.

Before moving to Scotland from Germany, I travelled and worked my way around the world. In New Zealand I was introduced to alien species eradication whilst working with the Department of Conservation as a volunteer ranger.





Cairngorms -Moray Mink Control Officer: Cat Robinson

My name is Cat Robinson and I've just moved up to the Cairngorms from Hampshire with my husband and our dog Archie. We're really excited about the move and can't wait to start exploring everything the area has to offer.

For the last 6 years I've been working for Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust on various river projects.

My more recent role has involved working in partnership with organisations, landowners and the local community to enhance the River Meon and its valley. This little known chalk stream supports many important species but unfortunately American mink moved in about 20 years ago. This led to the complete disappearance of water voles from the area. A large part of my role was therefore to encourage the monitoring and trapping of mink in the hope that water voles might be reintroduced at some point in the future.

I can't wait to get started in my new role and to work on such a large scale project.



North Tayside Mink Control Officer: Ann-Marie MacMaster



My name is Ann-Marie MacMaster and I have been working with wildlife, mainly mammals, since I graduated from University of Glasgow in 2000. Having had an interest in wildlife since I was very young it seemed natural to pursue a career in ecology. I have worked for several organisations, including Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust, Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Food and Environment Research Agency (formerly Central Science Laboratory). I have worked on a multitude of species across the UK, including otter, badger, red squirrel and wild boar and I now look forward to the challenge of the American mink.



*** Exciting vole news! ***

A black water vole was rescued from the roadside in St Combs, Aberdeenshire recently. It was unknown that water voles were in the area until now. Thanks to Dorothy Bruce for rescuing the vole and providing this picture.



Grampian Mammal Group (GMG) is the first Mammal Society affiliated local mammal group in Scotland. The Scottish Mink Initiative has joined this exciting new group!

The Mammal Society works to protect British mammals, halt the decline of threatened species, and advise on all issues affecting British mammals. The aim of the GMG is to provide a link between currently stand alone, mammal based projects in the region in order to increase the efficiency of such projects. GMG also wishes to offer a wide range of activities for volunteers to participate in by collating projects via its website so that potential volunteers can get in contact easily.

Working with the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC), GMG aims to increase the surveying and recording of all mammals across the North East & Grampian region and contribute to the UK wide Mammal Atlas.

<https://sites.google.com/site/grampianmammalgroup> or email grampianmammals@gmail.com

Aberdeenshire update - Sarah Atkinson

2011 has started with very few reported mink signs and sightings- although the spring has only begun! Six mink were caught on the Cluny burn, on the River Don over the past few months and there is a lot more work planned right across the Don catchment over the next six months. I intend to have a good coverage of rafts and traps across this catchment in time for autumn, so if you would like to get involved here, please do get in contact.

One large male mink was caught on the River Dye, a tributary to the Dee, showing that males really can pop up anywhere and vigilance is key.

So far only a handful of mink signs on the Ythan, although worryingly reports of three captures late last year near Rothienorman at the headwaters show that mink can also easily cross between catchments. It is suspected these rogue mink came from the Urie, a tributary of the Don- but the good news is they were caught!

Work still needs to be done across the whole of the River Ugie catchment, particularly around Strichen and the upper reaches. Although more signs have appeared around Peterhead and the Ugie estuary, these are swiftly being dealt with by an ever-vigilant volunteer!



Please note we have new contact details:

(Old email and phone will remain active for a limited time)

We are always looking for new volunteers! Contact us on:

For Aberdeenshire area - Sarah Atkinson sarah@rafts.org.uk 07825 180 319

For Cairngorms-Moray area - Cat Robinson cat@rafts.org.uk 07825 185 178

For North Tayside area - Ann-Marie MacMaster ann-marie@rafts.org.uk 07825 186 043

For Highland area - Gunnar Scholtz gunnar@rafts.org.uk 07825 184 080

For Deveron, Bogie & Isla - Alastair Fenn 07850 328382 alastairfenn@deveron.org

For West Coast (Kyle of Lochalsh & north) - Elaine Fraser 07801 953436 elaine.fraser@abdn.ac.uk

Project Co-ordinator - Hollie Walker hollie@rafts.org.uk 07825 183 037

www.watervolescotland.org



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