

# Scottish Mink Initiative

Working with Communities to Protect Native Wildlife



Newsletter No.3 September 2011

## News bites

### \*Glamis Countryside Festival

We will be attending Glamis Countryside Festival on 3 and 4 September 2011.

### \*Scottish Mink Initiative (SMI) is on Flickr!

Flickr is a free photo sharing website. SMI have set this up to enable volunteers to share their mink related images and to help each other identify foot prints on rafts. The group name is *Scottish Mink Initiative community*. Join us!

### \*Juvenile dispersal

Now is the **summer peak** for juvenile American mink dispersal and trapping!

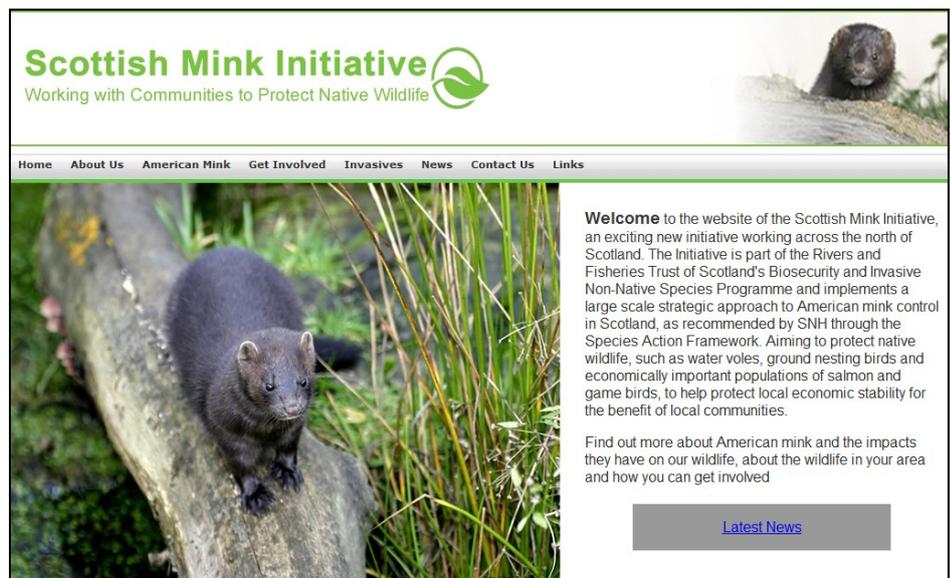
### \*Tell us a story!

We would like to hear about your experiences with American mink - strange places seen, close encounters, etc! The best stories will feature in our winter newsletter.

Please send to:

ann-marie@rafts.org.uk

## New Website!



[www.scottishmink.org.uk](http://www.scottishmink.org.uk)

## Our new website is live!

The website is packed full of information about the Scottish Mink Initiative, American mink, the species they impact upon and the latest news from across the Initiative area. Some of the website remains under construction, including a section for raft check data entry and educational resources currently being developed by Sarah. We are working to record a short film demonstrating the mink raft – what it is, how it works and what you might find.

We are also hoping to film an American mink using a monitoring raft with the use of a Stealth Cam – ‘Autumnwatch’ eat your heart out!

The volunteer pack issued to all new volunteers is available to download from the *Volunteering* section under *Get Involved*, together with a link to check the river levels in your area.

We will continue to update our volunteers and partners with regular newsletters which can also be found on the website.

## Progress so far...

Since work began in April this year, Scottish Mink Initiative staff have been very busy indeed!

Across the project area:

- 85 new volunteers have been recruited;
- 142 new rafts/tunnels have been put out; and
- 1198 enquiries were handled.

We have been really impressed with volunteer enthusiasm and commitment in particular on the Lunan (Angus), the River Nairn, the Findhorn and the Lossie.

Areas where we need more help include:

- north Tayside: River Ericht, North Esk, and Bervie;
- Aberdeenshire: River Don, particularly the River Urie and around Alford;
- Highland: Assynt, far North, east Caithness and Sutherland; and
- Cairngorm and Moray: Nairn, Findhorn, Lossie and Ness catchments.

**New volunteers across the project area are always welcomed.**

We would like to thank all our volunteers for their hard work and enthusiasm – each and every one of you plays a vital role and without you the project would not exist.

## SMI work with Local Schools

Sarah has been working with Dunnottar Primary School, Stonehaven and Mearns Academy, Laurencekirk to develop a new resource pack for schools. The activities developed fit neatly with the Curriculum for Excellence and help to bring the work done by the Scottish Mink Initiative and other organisations into the classroom.

Cat recently visited Aviemore Primary School to talk to Primary 5 about the impacts of non-native species on Scotland's native wildlife. The children learned how to identify some non-native species – and found there to be some surprise species on the list! American mink skins were passed around so that the children could feel why mink were farmed for their skins, and we then talked about the impact they are having on

local wildlife. Mrs Fitter said “The class thoroughly enjoyed the visit and they especially liked handling the American mink skins. It raised their awareness of how alien species can cause major problems to our native animals in Britain.”



**Ann-Marie presenting the work of Scottish Mink Initiative**

## Aquatic Invasive Plants

Cat, Ann-Marie and Sarah attended an Aquatic Invasive Plants training course learning to identify plants such as the American Skunk Cabbage.

Many aquatic invasive plants were introduced as oxygenating weeds for garden ponds and have subsequently escaped into the wider environment via floods, on bird's feet etc. Invasive plants can be just as problematic as invasive animals, in particular, species such as floating pennywort which can grow into dense mats, hampering water flow and increasing flooding.

Sarah organised a training course on the identi-



**We had stunning weather for the course!**



**American Skunk Cabbage**

cation of terrestrial invasive plants such as Giant Hogweed, Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam. The course was delivered together with the North East Scotland Biological Records Centre (NESBReC) and the River Ythan Trust. Records of some aquatic invasive plants are sparse so it is hoped that by training people to identify these plants, we can help build a more detailed picture of spread and action can be therefore be taken to control these species.

More information can be found here:  
[www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)

### A Reminder of our Contact Details....

Project Coordinator	Hollie Walker	07825 183 037	<a href="mailto:hollie@rafts.org.uk">hollie@rafts.org.uk</a>
Aberdeenshire	Sarah Atkinson	07825 180 319	<a href="mailto:sarah@rafts.org.uk">sarah@rafts.org.uk</a>
Cairngorms & Moray	Cat Robinson	07825 185 178	<a href="mailto:cat@rafts.org.uk">cat@rafts.org.uk</a>
North Tayside	Ann-Marie MacMaster	07825 186 043	<a href="mailto:ann-marie@rafts.org.uk">ann-marie@rafts.org.uk</a>
Highland	Gunnar Scholtz	07825 184 080	<a href="mailto:gunnar@rafts.org.uk">gunnar@rafts.org.uk</a>
Deveron, Bogie & Isla	Alastair Fenn	07850 328 382	<a href="mailto:alastairfenn@deveron.org">alastairfenn@deveron.org</a>
Cromarty, Conan & Kyle of Sutherland	Meryl Norris	07828 140 392	<a href="mailto:merylnorris@gmail.com">merylnorris@gmail.com</a>
West Coast (Kyle of Lochalsh & Gairloch)	Elaine Fraser	07801 953 436	<a href="mailto:elaine.fraser@abdn.ac.uk">elaine.fraser@abdn.ac.uk</a>

## North West Highlands – Changes in Area Covered

The number of American mink sightings reported in the northern Highlands has been steadily increasing since work on the Scottish Mink Initiative began in April this year.

A badly decomposed carcass was found on a farm on Loch Eriboll, Durness and was confirmed to be an American mink by the University of Aberdeen. By looking at the skull it is possible to identify between mink, ferret and pine marten. Each species' skull has unique fissure lines and bone plates which can be used to identify a carcass which may have died a long time ago. The National Museum, Edinburgh has an entire section dedicated to this kind of science.

Since this initial discovery, there have been several sightings on Loch Eriboll and as far east as Bettyhill. Due to the increased activity in an area previously believed to be free of American mink, it was decided that Gunnar's efforts should be focussed on assessing the size of the American mink



population in this area. In support of this, Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust will take over the management of mink work in their catchment, including the lower parts of the Dornoch Firth. Project Officer Meryl Norris has been working on invasive species for more than a year and will now take the mink work forward in this area.

In addition Cat will now cover Ness and Beaully in addition to her previous area.

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**We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our partners and funding organisations**



This project is being part-financed by the Scottish Government and European Community Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Rural Aberdeenshire and Rural Tayside Local Action Groups LEADER 2007-2013 Programme