



## RAFTS Scottish Invasive Species Initiative Wins Heritage Lottery Fund Support

We are delighted to announce that the Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS) has received £41,900 from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) to begin developing the Scottish Invasive Species Initiative (SISI). This grant will enable RAFTS to apply for a full grant at a later date.

This ambitious project will create a network of volunteers to eradicate and control several invasive non-native species across a 29,500 km<sup>2</sup> area in the north of Scotland, focussing on rivers, lochs and riparian corridors.



On top of managing these non-native invasive species, the project aims to help local people take care of their local rivers and riparian habitats. Volunteers, who will be recruited from a variety of community groups, will learn about the targeted species and gain skills in the various techniques used to survey and control them, such as spraying plants with pesticides and trapping mink. They and the wider public will also be encouraged to use specially-developed on-line apps to identify and record where and when they see non-native invasive species. Volunteers will also learn how to restore sites that were previously full of non-native plants to a more native, natural state. By the end of the project, volunteers will have the skills and knowledge

to conserve their local habitats long after the project is finished.

Scotland's rivers, burns, lochs and pools support many iconic Scottish species including Atlantic salmon, osprey and otter, as well as the endangered freshwater pearl mussel. They also form part of an incredible landscape that attracts millions of tourists a year to Scotland, helping to boost our economy, and providing the country with vital services such as drinking water, electricity generation and flood protection.

Chris Horrill from RAFTS said, "We're delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support. The threat of invasive species is increasing as our climate continues to change and this project will help us take action against this. It gives people in Scotland the opportunity to protect their natural environment and ensure we continue to benefit from it while maintaining its beauty."

Julia Stubbs-Partridge from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), one of RAFTS partners in the project, said, "To receive this funding from HLF is great news. Invasive species are a growing threat and projects like this will ensure we can protect Scotland's natural landscape, not only for the benefit of the people of Scotland but also for visitors."



Supported by  
**The National Lottery**<sup>®</sup>  
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Le taic bhon  
**Chrannchur Nàiseanta**  
tro Mhaoin-Dualchais a' Chrannchuir



**Scottish Natural Heritage**  
**Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba**  
All of nature for all of Scotland  
Nàdar air fad airson Alba air fad

## West Sutherland Fisheries Trust - Adam Beynon-Jones

All was quiet in the early months of spring other than one set of suspected mink prints found on a raft in the Reiff area in mid-March. Unfortunately, despite a trap being deployed no mink were caught. Shona continued to liaise with volunteers and monitor WSFT's rafts and tunnels until handing the SMI work over to myself, Adam Beynon-Jones, the newly appointed Assistant Biologist in mid-May.

As well as continuing to monitor WSFT's rafts I have been busy getting to know our fantastic network of volunteers, delivering clay, and searching in the field for defunct rafts and tunnels, several of which have been restored and assigned to newly recruited volunteers.

Following an enjoyable and productive visit from Ann-Marie MacMaster in late June, potential mink activity has seen myself and the volunteers becoming rather busy; 2 mink sightings, 2 suspicious sets of prints, and the remains of a (mink's?) hearty meal of ground nesting bird's eggs, all occurred within 3 weeks of each other. Traps, tunnels and rafts have been placed in response to these events, with nothing turning up so far. While it is uncertain whether or not some of these incidents are false alarms, they have occurred within the southern reaches of the trust's boundaries, in keeping with previous mink activity. We will continue to work hard in the hope of removing any mink that are present.

WSFT would like to say a big thank you to our volunteers; it wouldn't be possible without you!



Adam Beynon-Jones, 01971 502259, [wsft@btconnect.com](mailto:wsft@btconnect.com)

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

## Wester Ross Fisheries Trust - Peter Cunningham

Rafts and tunnels continue to be checked by volunteers as they go about their day to day activities. Mink reported earlier in the year near Loch Broom and near Aultbea were not subsequently caught so it was not surprising to get a phone call last week (mid July) from a member of the public reporting the sighting of a family of 4 mink seen near the shore by Loch Ewe - volunteers in the area were duly informed.



Nearby is a weedy lochan which used to have nesting moorhens, coots, little grebes, black-headed gulls and ducks. I'm not sure whether any gulls or wildfowl have bred successfully there this year. However, only a few hundred metres offshore, a colony of Common terns have bred successfully, rearing 20 chicks (not as many as in some other years). The terns nest on an old concrete pier, which can only be accessed from the sea via an old metal ladder.

There are many records of mink decimating colonies of terns on islands elsewhere in the west of Scotland however it is just about possible that this old WW2 'nesting platform' which belongs to the MOD, is mink proof... The Wester Ross Environment Network has plans to set up a remote camera on the nesting platform in 2016 to learn more about the tern colony and the factors that may influence breeding success there.

Are you aware of locations where terns have successfully bred (in the west of Scotland) this year - if so please get in touch!

Peter Cunningham, [info@wrft.org.uk](mailto:info@wrft.org.uk), 01445 712899

## Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust - Lynn Brydon

A number of possible mink sightings have been reported in the Dornoch Firth and Tain/Fearn areas. Volunteers nearby have been contacted and traps deployed - to date we have had no captures. New volunteers have been recruited within these areas by knocking on doors.

The Greenhouse in Dingwall has agreed to display SMI posters, newsletters, leaflets and Meryl the mink as part of the Dingwall Environment group's information area. The Dingwall Environment group has relaunched this month and has been the main organiser to the Dingwall Seashore Festival. It is hoped through the festival and the Greenhouse display area that new volunteers will be recruited to help with invasive species work.

A different approach in promoting SMI has been to work with primary school children in the Cromarty Firth area and delivering a non-native species programme.

Meryl the mink joined me in my classroom visits and stole the show! I explained the concept of a 'non-native invasive species' to the children and together we discussed where they come from and what makes them so successful. We explored the potential negative impacts that these species can have on native species and habitats and learned simple ways in which we can help to prevent the spread of some of these species. Using what they had learned the children then sketched and described their own invasive species. This fired their imaginations - let's hope we don't come upon one of these in our day to day work!



Lynn Brydon, 07428 189161, [lynn.brydon@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lynn.brydon@hotmail.co.uk)

## Ness and Beaully Fisheries Trust - Chris Daphne

It's that time of year folks and once again we are swamped with sightings on the River Ness, especially around Bught Park. A family of nine mink were spotted swimming in the water upstream of Holm Mills before disappearing under the bank. Mink have also been seen on the Caledonian Canal and trapping is now underway there. In addition a den was discovered on an artificial channel adjacent to the river. A new volunteer was recruited and traps were set which resulted in the capture of a juvenile female! Other captures include a



male and female captured on Culburnie Burn in February and an adult (not sexed) on the Moniack Burn in April.

The area in Inverness from which most sightings occur is difficult to monitor and trap. It offers perfect habitat for mink. There are 4 watercourses: the River Ness, Caledonian Canal, Mill Laide and Electric Burn all of which run parallel with woodland and fields in between. The river and canal banks are reinforced with boulders so mink could move up and down the banks within the boulders completely unnoticed. Food sources are in abundance with rabbits and ducks plentiful together with fish. It's possible that there could be a number of mink here as sightings suggest.

If you happen to spot a mink whilst out and about, I would be grateful if you could note where you saw it and let me know.

Finally we would like to thank our volunteers for donating their time and energy to monitoring and trapping mink on the Ness and Beaully catchments - its very much appreciated.

Chris Daphne, 01463 783505, [chris.nbft@gmail.com](mailto:chris.nbft@gmail.com)

## Spey Foundation - Polly Burns

Springtime on the Spey - well to say it has been a mixed bag of weather would be an understatement! With beautiful warm sunshine one week to snowfall the next, the summer has been a bit slow to get going. In contrast, mink sightings have been on the go since March, with 8 sightings of mink throughout the catchment since then. Some have been successfully captured, but unfortunately we have struggled to mop them all up. We are really keen to recruit some new volunteers at the moment, so if you are interested in monitoring and or trapping mink please get in touch. We plan to check all the rafts in the catchment over the summer so that by the end we will have a much clearer picture of our raft coverage and the areas that need a bit more work.

We have been taking some information on mink to recent events in the Spey catchment, including the 'SpeyFantastic' event at the Cairngorms Nature Festival, where people were interested to hear about mink and the problems they cause on the Spey. We will also be attending the Grantown Show on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup> August, so if you find yourself in the area please come along for a chat!



Polly Burns, [p.burns@speyfisheryboard.com](mailto:p.burns@speyfisheryboard.com), 01340 810841

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

## Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust - Bob Laughton

The local bailiffs from the Findhorn and Nairn Fishery Boards have continued coordinating control and trapping in the Rivers Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie during 2015 with volunteers and gamekeepers. Sightings of mink during spring and summer 2015 were the low.

Three mink were captured and dispatched - two were from the coastal area around Covesea on the Moray Firth coast, while the third was from the Findhorn and captured by local fishing ghillie, Ian Neale. The population around the Covesea to Loch Spynie area continues to cling on although sightings and captures are less this season thanks to the continued efforts of volunteer, John Hall.



The capture up at Altyre on the Findhorn was a surprise since no reports of mink have been logged from this area for some time. The captured individual was male and it demonstrates the need to maintain an array of rafts and volunteers to monitor mink movements allowing early detection of the invaders.

Trapping also continues along the Lossie and Nairn and surrounding areas but no definite reports of mink activity this year.

As always a huge thanks to all our volunteers and gamekeepers for their help and if you feel you can contribute by operating a monitoring raft or trap then please get in touch.

Bob Laughton, [director@fnlft.org.uk](mailto:director@fnlft.org.uk), 01309 611 220

## Deveron, Bogie & Isla, Water of Philorth and Strathbeg - Robin Vasey

Things have been relatively quiet across the Deveron, Bogie and Isla, Water of Philorth and Strathbeg catchments.

Three mink have been removed since February this year: 1 in April on the Cuning Burn near Turiff (Deveron catchment) and 2 from the River Isla in May and July.

Sightings were reported near MacDuff and Roseheart in July however traps set in response did not result in any captures.

We are delighted that an extension to our highly successful Deveron Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) Control Project has been granted by Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). We have been awarded £31,875 by SNH to allow the project to continue and develop over the next 15 months. The main objectives of the project extension are to continue the control of nuisance species and make the control more sustainable going forward. Successes of phase 1 and 2 included the coordination of catchment wide (12,66Km) control of

the dangerous Giant Hogweed, including the use of techniques such as grazing control, the removal of 270+ American Mink and the control of 28 sites of Japanese Knotweed.

The 15 month funding package from SNH will allow the DBIT to continue to contract a full-time Biosecurity Officer to coordinate the project. One of the main responsibilities of the Officer will be to co-opt and manage volunteers (River Champions) and work with local landowners in the monitoring and control programme throughout the Deveron district. The Water of Philorth, Water of Troupe and the Burn of Boyne are within the coastal remit of the DBIT, so these watercourses are also covered by the project in collaboration with the Scottish Mink Initiative.

If anyone would like to participate by becoming a "river champion" or if landowners require advice on invasive species control and potential SRDP grants available, please contact the Deveron, Bogie and Isla Trust.

**Robin Vasey, 07771 874 579, [robinvasey@deveron.org](mailto:robinvasey@deveron.org)**

## River Don, Ythan and Ugie Catchments - Matt Oliver

It's been over six months since the last mink was captured on the Don, Ythan or Ugie catchments. The last mink trapped on the Don was on the Kemnay Angling Club beat in September 2014. Any sightings and prints in the last year have been few and far between and, although action is being taken to capture these last canny mink, to date any trapping has largely been unsuccessful.

A mink may leave prints on a raft for a trap to be set only for trapping to be unsuccessful and no recurrence of the prints. Similarly, trapping following the occasional sighting, or image captured on a camera trap, has led to nothing. There are certainly far fewer mink about - I often visit the Don recreationally and almost never spot mink prints on the banks - I would have expected to find them almost everywhere just a few years ago.

The most recent sighting was from near Hatton of Fintray and a new raft has been put in place along with some bank side traps (see photo opposite) to try and capture the culprit. Fingers crossed for a result and many thanks to the volunteers who reported it and those that are helping with the follow up action. The presence of any persisting female mink is more likely to be revealed at this time of year since emerging young are much easier to spot as they explore the territory together than their solitary mother, so please always stay vigilant.

Many thanks for all your ongoing support.



**Matt Oliver, [mattoliverecology@gmail.com](mailto:mattoliverecology@gmail.com), 07882 560603**

## River Dee Fisheries Trust - Jamie Urquhart

The present mink activity within the Dee, Cowie and Carron catchments is as low as I can recall. Few mink or mink signs have been reported over the period February to August and I'm confident that this is as a result of low mink abundance as opposed to poor awareness. Aside from two mink captures - one in February and the other in April, there has been very little mink activity, with any confirmed sightings focused in the lower Dee catchment from Banchory downstream or in the coastal catchments of the Cowie and Carron.

In other news the River Dee Trust has been working with over 300 school children teaching them about issues relating to the management of the catchment. Invasive non-native species (INNS) awareness is an essential component of this work and 'Malcolm' our stuffed mink has helped convey the SMI message to the children very effectively.

Alongside this work an invasive plant species control project focusing upon the lower Dee catchment has commenced. The project funded by the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route, in partnership with the River Dee Trust and Dee Catchment Partnership, aims to control INNS plants in the Lower Dee. We are looking to recruit new volunteers to assist with INNS plant control - training will be provided - please contact me if you are interested in diversifying your volunteering experience.

Please stay vigilant over the coming months and thanks once again for the ongoing support.

**Stop press! Unverified reports of a mink and her litter spotted on Cowie catchment by Stonehaven.**



Jamie Urquhart, 01339 880411 , [Jamie@riverdee.org](mailto:Jamie@riverdee.org)

## Esk Rivers Fisheries Trust - Nigel McMullen

5 mink sightings were reported during the months of June and July - 4 from the North Esk and 1 from the South Esk. Of particular note was a family of mink which were spotted moving to and from their den which they accessed through a hole in a wall of an old mill (see photo below), not far from the River North Esk.



Quick action was taken by setting traps in the immediate vicinity of the den which resulted in the removal of 2 juveniles. The remainder of the family appear to have left the natal den as no more sightings have been reported from local residents.

We have had a lot of rain these past weeks which resulted in some very big spates - including some rises of over 11ft! This has caused a lot of damage to river banks and property close to the rivers. So far I have had not been informed of any loss of equipment.

In the coming weeks and months I plan to get in touch with all volunteers and visit all of the raft sites across the ERFT area. If you are aware that you need some equipment then please get in touch and I will ensure I bring it on my rounds.

Thank you to all the volunteers who monitor and trap mink on the Bervie Water, River North Esk, River South Esk and Lunan Water - your help is much appreciated.

Nigel McMullen, 07786 060431 , [ngmcm1@aol.com](mailto:ngmcm1@aol.com)

## North Tay - Ann-Marie MacMaster

Mink activity on the North Tay has largely been confined to the Isla catchment and the Lunan Burn.

A female mink was removed from the River Isla in April and a male from the main stem of the Tay, near Aberfeldy, in March. We have also had 2 sightings from the Spittalfield area (the most recent sighting being a small family of mink). You may recall we caught a male mink on the Lunan Burn in November last year (see Spring [2015 SMI Newsletter](#)). Well after a quiet winter, mink prints were recorded on 1 of our 7 rafts on the Lunan Burn in March. Since then sporadic prints have been recorded across those 7 rafts.... The last record of mink prints was 2 July and since then a keen and committed volunteer has been trying to trap the animal... To further rub salt in the wound a mink (the same one?!) was seen near Forneth at the end of June. The mink remains at large but we will not be give up!

I told you about a cautious mink repeatedly swimming past and ignoring a raft in the [Autumn 2014 SMI Newsletter](#). The first capture was made on this raft in October last year and the 7<sup>th</sup> capture was made on 18 July this year! This has turned out to be a great location for a mink raft – and not just because of the number of mink removed – several animals have been filmed using the raft – these can be seen [here](#).

Thank you as ever to all the volunteers on the North Tay – you guys are doing a great job - it's a pleasure to work with such enthusiastic folks!



Ann-Marie MacMaster, 07825 186043, [ann-marie@rafts.org.uk](mailto:ann-marie@rafts.org.uk)

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

## Events and Activities

### Cromarty Firth Fisheries Trust:

- 5 September 2015 (1000—1600) **Dingwall Wildlife Day**, Dingwall. Contact Lynn Brydon [lynn.brydon@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:lynn.brydon@hotmail.co.uk) or the Greenhouse in Dingwall for further details.
- 28 November 2015 (1000—1200) **Loch na Croic Hatchery Open Day**. Contact Lynn Brydon for further details.

### Findhorn, Nairn & Lossie Fisheries Trust:

- 27 September 2015 **Logie Family Fun Day**, Logie, near Foress. Contact Findhorn, Nairn and Lossie Fisheries Trust for further information.

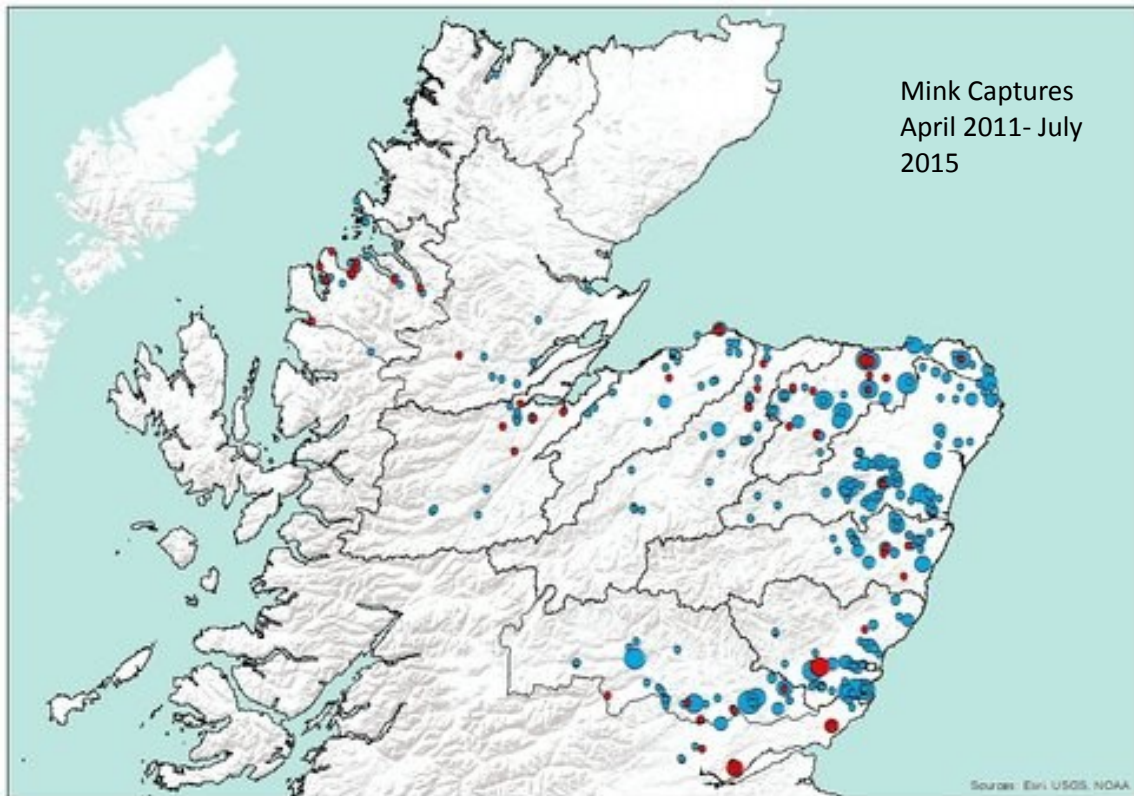
### Spey Foundation:

- 13 August 2015 **Grantown Show**. Please see <http://www.grantownshow.co.uk/> for more details.
- 23 August 2015 (1000 – 1700) **Grantown-on-Spey Highland Games** See <http://www.welcometoscotland.com/things-to-do/events/aviemore-cairngorms/grantown-on-spey-highland-games> for further details - Spey Foundation will be there promoting the work that they do!

### River Dee Trust:

- 21 August 2015 **Ladies Fishing Day on the Dee**. Please see <https://fishdee.wordpress.com/> for further details.
- 26 and 27 August 2015 **Marr Area partnership Workshop** - promoting the ways in which communities can enhance and protect the River Dee - Please see <http://www.theriverdee.org/events.asp> for further details.

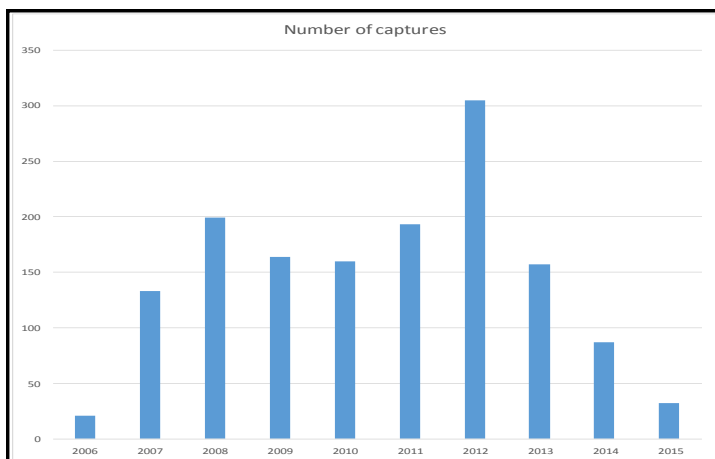
## Progress across the Scottish Mink Initiative area



Responsibility for coordinating the volunteer and raft networks was transferred from Mink Control Officers to local fisheries trusts at the end of SMI Phase 1, in August 2013.

The map above shows the locations of captures in the last year (July 2014—July 2015) in red and captures from April 2011 - June 2014 in blue - larger circles indicate a larger number of captures.

The majority of mink removed over the last year are on the southern edge of the SMI area - i.e. Wester Ross and Tayside (areas subject to immigration from the south), around the coast and lowlands (optimal habitat) and in the Great Glen (a known dispersal route).



The graph opposite shows the number of mink captures since 2006. There has been a marked decrease in captures since 2012 (\*only the first half of 2015 is shown).

The number of volunteers and monitoring rafts has remained stable since 2013 - we currently have 633 volunteers (who monitor and/or set traps and/or dispatch) and 992 mink monitoring rafts and tunnels across the Scottish Mink Initiative area! We are always looking for new volunteers so if you are reading this and would like to get involved please get in touch!

