

Water voles

Ecology

Water voles were once a common and widespread within the UK but are now restricted to a small number of sites owing to destruction of habitat and predation by mink, a non-native species. Water voles occur within water courses that have well vegetated banks, avoiding watercourse which are heavily wooded. Although they do not hibernate water voles are most active from April to October.

Legislation

Water voles and their burrows are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) as such it is an offence to intentionally kill or injure a water vole, damage or destroy their places of shelter or protection or disturb them in a place of shelter or protection.

Planning and Survey effort required

To ensure that Local Planning Authority and the relevant competent authority can successfully determine either a planning application or a licence application it is important that sufficient survey data is gathered. In the UK, surveys typically follow the methods set within the Water vole Mitigation Handbook (Mammal Society (2016)). Deviation from these guidelines needs to be fully justified and could lead to the refusal of planning permission or a licence application.

The following, with reference to the Water Vole Mitigation Handbook is the typical process for undertaking water vole surveys

Presence/ absence survey- Water vole surveys require the banks of any stretch of water course likely to be effected by the proposed development to be searched for evidence of water voles. Evidence searched for includes latrines, feeding remains, footprints and burrows.

Surveys for water voles are undertaken from **mid-April to June**, when water voles are active and bankside vegetation is minimal, allowing evidence of water voles to be searched for. If presence of water voles is recorded then no further survey work is required. If however, no evidence of water voles is recorded and the habitats are considered suitable then a further survey in **July-September** is required.



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