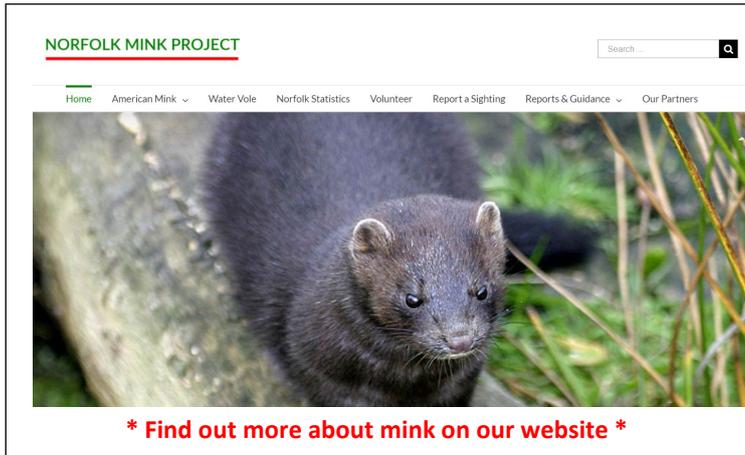




NORFOLK MINK PROJECT

Annual Newsletter 6, January – December 2018

*** Website <https://thenorfolkproject.org.uk/> ***



2018 STATISTICS	
Total Mink Caught	39
Rafts Deployed	431
Traps on Loan	435
Volunteers Involved	292

Great news, with the support of all our volunteers, we are continuing to reduce the density of mink across the county. Fewer mink were caught in 2018 than in any year since trapping first began on the Rivers Wensum and Nar in 2003. Following those first two projects, trapping expanded into the Broads in 2006 and then further expanded to cover the whole of the county by 2016. As explained later, we are confident that we now really do have **fewer mink in Norfolk than at any time since trapping started** and not that less trapping is taking place overall. This adds up to one less pressure on our wildlife and we can continue to see species such as water voles on our waterways. A fantastic result but please keep vigilant so that we can maintain the progress made over the past 15 years.

TRAPPING SUMMARY

Figure 1 shows the distribution of trapping effort across the county in 2018. Raft positions indicate where a raft was sited; these may either have been in monitoring mode or had a trap in the tunnel. Trap positions are those where a trap is sited on the land and will proba-

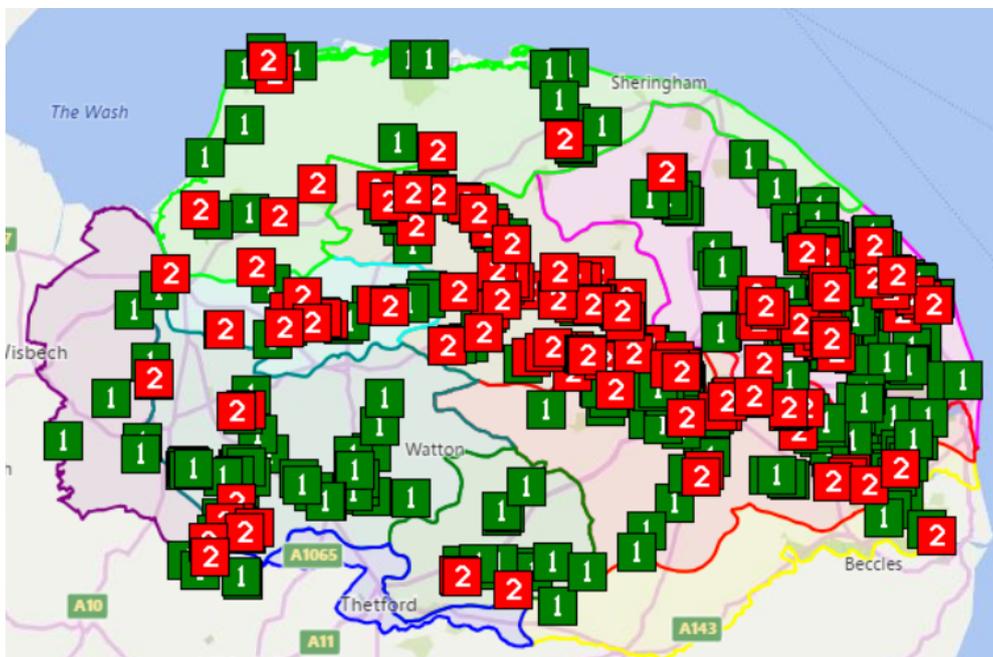


Figure 1
Raft & trap positions current in 2018



ably be set periodically through the year. A significant change this year has been the increased use of automated trap monitoring devices with trade names such as 'Mink Police' and 'Remoti'. These are boxes that are attached to a trap that let the operator know, by a message to a phone or computer, when something has been trapped. They also send a message a few times a day just to confirm they are still working and all is in order. The big advantage of these is that traps can be permanently set but only visited when they have caught. Twenty of the mink caught this year (53%) were caught in traps that were remotely monitored.



Caught using 'Mink Police'. © S Mace

Figure 2. Number of mink events (captures, sightings, field sign etc) per tetrad

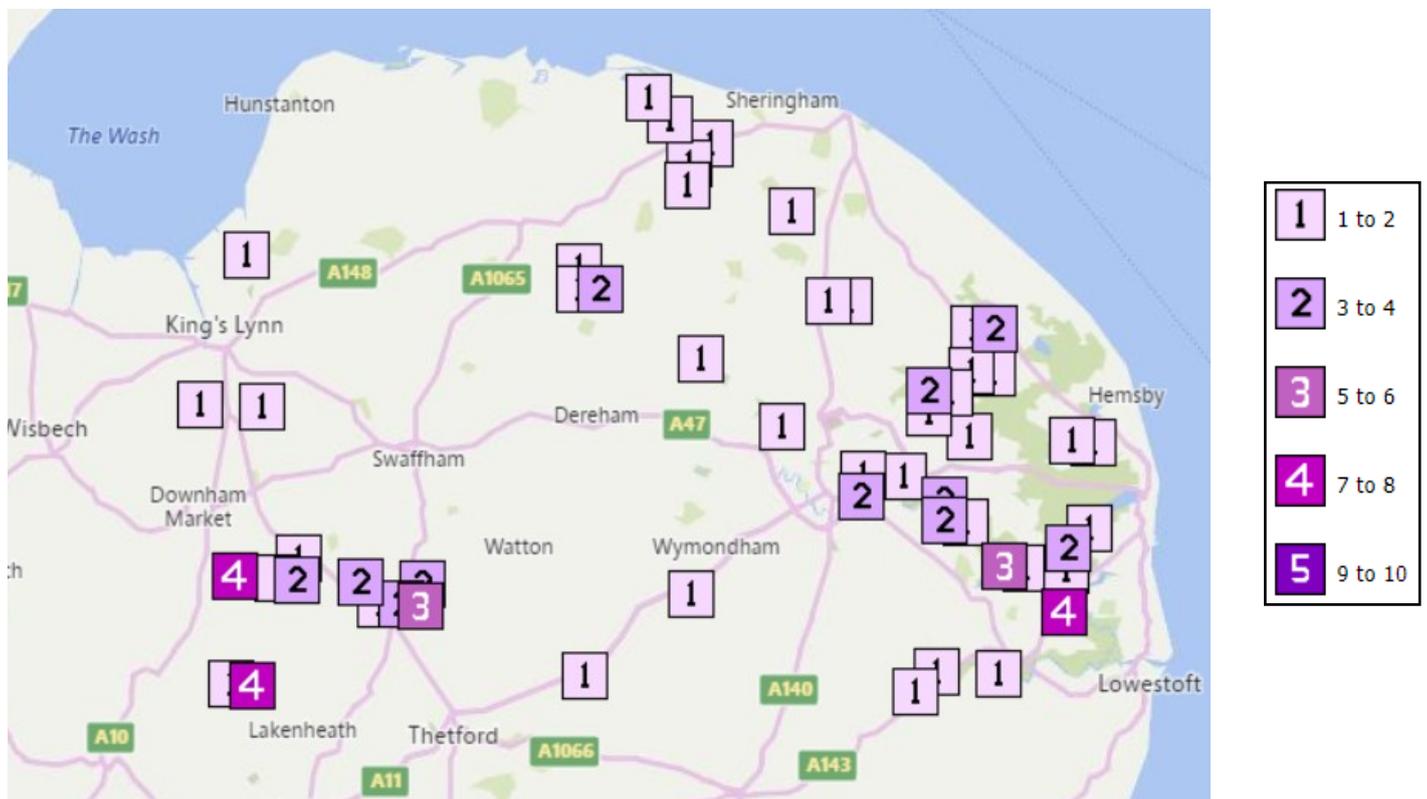
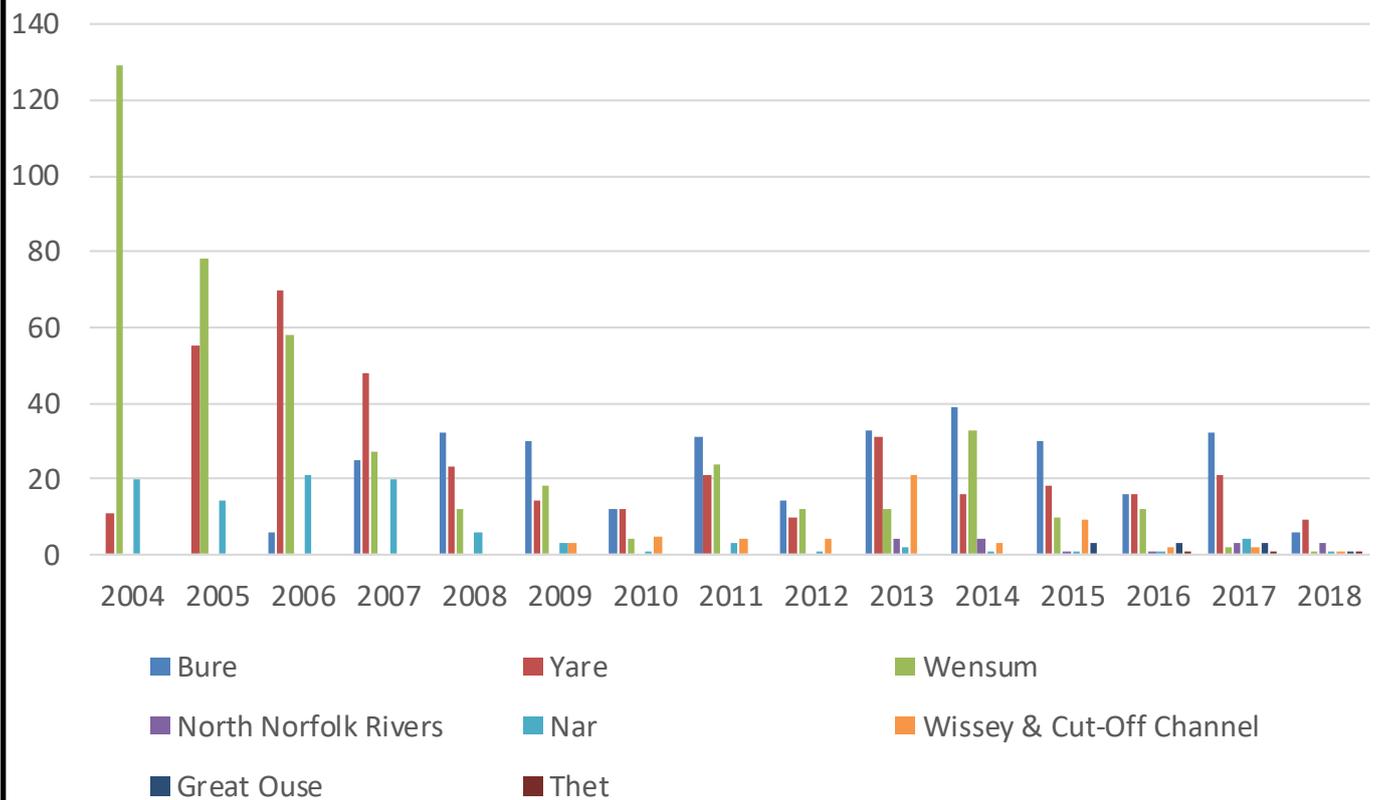


Figure 2 shows all the evidence of mink that has been recorded in 2018. Overall there has been a substantial reduction in all 'events' (sightings, raft evidence, road kills etc) compared to 2017, indicating that the fall in the number killed reflects a real drop in the overall mink population in Norfolk. Another way of looking to see if the reduction in kill reflects a real fall in the overall population, is to look at the kill per unit of effort. We cannot do this precisely as The Project is not a scientific experiment but we have developed a formula to estimate the number of trap inspections each year (details can be found in the report by C Pyatt available on our website). We can then look at the number of mink caught per 100 inspections. This index is now only about 10% of that recorded for the first full year of trapping in 2004. The long term changes in mink captures and the impact of the project can be clearly seen in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Number of mink taken per catchment by year



Most mink are still found in the Broads although there has been a significant reduction from previous years. The Broads remains one of the most challenging areas to trap and we have just heard that we have been successful in a bid to the Waters, Mills & Marshes project, administered by the Broads Authority. This will allow us to place a dozen more automated trapping devices in the Broads area. The Wissey and Cut-off Channel continue to have regular signs of mink presence, although few have been caught. The Little Ouse is largely trapped as part of the Suffolk Project but this year we have had a report, for the first time, from a volunteer based in Cambridgeshire with two trap locations just in Norfolk. These are rafts with traps fitted with remote monitoring devices (Remoti in this case) and between them have caught 10 mink this year. This has boosted our total county kill by about 30% but will have prevented these mink travelling further into Norfolk and Suffolk!

CATCHMENT REPORTS FROM OUR CO-ORDINATORS

BURE, YARE & THET

Stephen Mace

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MINK CAUGHT & STATUS 2018

Number caught in previous year ()

Bure **6** (32) ●

Yare **9** (21) ●

Thet **1** (1) ●

Bure

Captures in the Bure for 2018 have taken a dramatic fall compared to 2017, with numbers down from 32 to 6! Most of the mink caught were in the Broad's area of the catchment. We are also hearing about more water voles sightings/signs in places where we have not had them before. Coverage in the Bure is not too bad, but we are still looking for volunteers north to north west of Aylsham and also in the Halvergate / Acle area.



R. Chet, 2017 © Norman Wyatt

Yare

The trend from the Bure has continued into the Yare with numbers also down in 2018, to 9 from 21 the previous year. The area from Reedham to Norwich has seen the most activity, predominantly close to the main river. Water voles have also been seen to be returning to some areas, for example, we have had signs and sightings along parts of the river Chet.

Thet

This has been another very quiet year with only one mink being caught. We have gained a few more volunteers in the area so the coverage is a little better, however we are still looking for more to help. If you know anyone in the Thet catchment who might be interested in joining, please pass on my contact information.

**North Norfolk Rivers
GT. OUSE & NAR**

Rory Hart

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MINK CAUGHT & STATUS 2018	North Norfolk	5 (3)	
Number caught in previous year ()			
	Great Ouse	0 (3)	
	Nar	1 (4)	

North Norfolk Rivers

Mink reports in the north of the county remain relatively few, however the River Glaven continues to have sporadic activity. The frequency of sightings increased in the summer with some excellent trail camera footage showing both a family of otter (adult and 3 juveniles) and a group of mink, also adult and 3 young, using the same river crossing point near Stody. The pictures not only show the species clearly but also raise awareness that otter do not always drive mink out of an area as is sometimes assumed. In response to the reports the Glaven conservation group have been particularly active and have caught 2 individuals near Glandford and a third was caught by a volunteer at Hempstead. I am grateful for the efforts of the group and the coordination shown by a diligent group of conservation minded people. Mink activity was also reported on the Babbingley near Castle Rising where 2 animals were caught. There have also been a number of volunteers interested in working with the project and are keen to monitor events along the course of the river up to it's source.

Great Ouse

Reports of mink on the river remain very low but as was mentioned in our last newsletter I am wary that the species is under recorded. Awareness of the project has increased with two reports of mink sightings being given by individuals living over the border in Cambridgeshire. The project has continued to supply equipment to local land owners, organisations and people with an enthusiasm to reduce predation of water voles by mink in the area. A single animal was caught on the New Bedford River. In other catchments, gravel pits have often been particularly attractive to mink. I would be most interested to hear from anyone with access to a quarry or mineral site so that control measures could be set in place. There is a chance that mink may concentrate in the area of such sites where there is often a greater diversity of habitat and hunting opportunities than in the surrounding farmland.

Nar

Very little Mink activity has been reported in the last 12 months. A single animal was captured near Blackborough, close to where several animals were taken in 2017. Since this capture no further sightings or trapping success has been noted. Despite the limited signs or records of late, I would welcome any opportunity to increase the monitoring /trapping effort on the lower Nar. There are several areas where volunteers are spread rather thinly on the ground and habitat with the potential to hold mink is quite widespread. I would be delighted to come out and meet game keepers, representatives of conservation bodies or landowners / occupiers with river access or wetland on their holding with the aim of coordinating mink control on a river wide scale. The greater the trapping coverage the more likely we are to remove mink from the catchment.

WENSUM AND WISSEY

Paul Gambling

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MINK KILL & STATUS 2018

Number caught in previous year ()

Wensum

1 (2)



Wissey

1 (2)



Wissey

The number of mink signs found in 2018 doubled (to 28) compared with 2017, spread throughout the mid to lower catchment from STANTA to Hilgay and spread evenly over the year. Signs often appeared at the same time in different parts of the catchment, suggesting that there are a number of mink still at large. Since signs rarely appeared at the same sites in successive checks, this suggests also that the mink are moving around and not staying resident. This has made it very difficult to trap them. However, during the last month or so of the year we found repeat signs at Hilgay, where there is a vulnerable water vole colony, and where trapping effort will be focussed. We have a limited number of trappers and monitors at present, so any extra help in the lower reaches, or anywhere on the Cut-off Channel or upstream of Bodney would be gratefully appreciated. Also if you would be willing to dispatch mink trapped in your general area for those who do not have access to suitable weapons, please let me know.

Wensum

The past year has seen a further fall in mink numbers compared with 2017. Signs of mink have again been rare at key points on the Wensum where mink have been caught in large numbers before. There were only 8 instances of sign being detected with the bulk of the signs being in the upper reaches from Fakenham to North Elmham, including a capture near Bintree. This almost certainly reflects a real decline in numbers. There were one-off signs at Lyng and Costessey but these were not repeated and trapping there produced no results so there may be a small number of mink travelling through the catchment. However, far fewer people are monitoring and trapping in other areas, particularly the tributaries such as the Tud, Wendling Brook and Whitewater. So it is hard to know whether or not the low numbers detected on the mid to lower reaches and tributaries are real, or reflect the less widespread monitoring. We have now procured materials for a significant number of rafts, so if you are interested in starting up or resuming monitoring, please contact me.

WAVENY AND LITTLE OUSE

Penny Hemphill

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&

Stephen Mace (Norfolk bank of Waveny)

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MINK CAUGHT & STATUS 2018

Number caught in previous year ()

Waveney **43** (18)



Little Ouse **21** (13)



As you probably know by now, for historic reasons, control in these two catchments is carried out primarily by the Suffolk Wildlife Trust in collaboration with the Norfolk Project. We are very grateful for all their work along the boundary rivers.

Waveney

Suffolk has seen the number of mink taken in the county increase to 100 in 2018. A significant part of the increase has been along the two large rivers that form the boundary of the county to the north and south, the Waveney and the Stour.

In Suffolk the number of mink taken along the Waveney has more than doubled from the previous year, to 38 in 2018. In Norfolk the increase is reflected in the 5 mink that were caught in the lower reaches of the catchment, all of those were at Haddiscoe. If you know anyone along the Norfolk side of the Waveney who might be interested in joining please pass on my (Stephen's) details or contact me.

Little Ouse

Numbers on the Little Ouse have also risen, although the focus has moved downstream, towards the Great Ouse. Eleven mink were caught in Suffolk and another 10 in Norfolk. These were on or near the county boundary and in previous years these may have been

accounted for in Cambridgeshire. Interestingly the ten mink, and a further 5 mink caught nearby, were all males. This highly skewed distribution of the sexes is unlikely to have occurred by chance (a probability of less than 1 in 10,000) offering scope for speculation: for example, are females avoiding these rafts because they have a strong male scent? We don't know the answer to this but some speculation is often interesting!

A FOCUS ON PARTNERS

The Norfolk Rivers Trust are a welcome new addition to our partnership this year.

Norfolk Rivers Trust

We are delighted to be a new addition to the Norfolk Mink Project Steering Group, a project that is important for effectively controlling the introduced mink. We look forward to playing a greater role in preventing the detrimental impact this species can have on our own native wildlife and wetland environments through our day to day work with partners, landowners and volunteers across Norfolk.

Who are we?

Established in 2011, Norfolk Rivers Trust (NRT) is an independent and trusted charity that works to restore, protect and enhance the water environments of Norfolk.

Working across Norfolk (and in the Cam and Ely Ouse Catchment), we take a river catchment-based approach (CaBA) to deliver: aquatic habitat creation; conservation and restoration; education and engagement; land management and farm advice. We work in partnership with a wide range of organisations, including farmers, landowners, water companies, government bodies and NGOs, as well as the general public. Find out more about us here: <https://norfolkriverstrust.org/>

NEWS: COMPLETE ERADICATION OF MINK FROM THE UK?

When we extended the Norfolk Mink Project to cover the whole county we knew we couldn't completely eradicate mink as we would always get immigration from outside the county boundary and we did not have sufficient resource to go quite that far. However, we have succeeded in dramatically reducing mink levels across the county. Our experience and that from other projects in Scotland and elsewhere have led to the question of possible eradication being raised. The catalyst has been Professor Tony Martin who recently returned to East Anglia after leading the successful eradication of rats and mice from the large Antarctic island of South Georgia.

Tony was struck by recent technological changes, such as remote trap monitoring devices and improvements in eDNA technology, which should make it possible to detect mink presence from a sample of river water. Used in combination with mink rafts he felt that it might, at last, be possible to think about very large scale eradication. A letter from Tony and several others with experience of mink control (including our Chairman) was sent out to a range of organisations involved with countryside management to see how they felt about the possibility. The response was overwhelmingly positive.

The next stage is to try and get a pilot going, which might well be to try and eradicate mink across the Anglian River Basin District (about 20% of England). Although there would still be immigration into the area, there should be sufficient distance to the periphery to make it possible to completely eradicate mink from Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. If that could be achieved it would be a strong indication that eradication across the whole of England & Wales was viable, with Scotland hopefully not far behind. While mink farming still takes place in Eire, eradication in Northern Ireland would not be viable. Whilst planning is at an early stage, and there are plenty of challenges, there could be exciting times ahead — especially if you are part of the normal diet of a mink!

AND FINALLY

Joe Kenworthy has recently been appointed as the new Coordinator of the Norfolk Non-Native Species Initiative (NNNSI), hosted by Norfolk County Council. He will take over the administrative and general management duties for the NMP from Katy Owen. Joe has a strong background in ecology and has spent the last few years investigating how invasive species impact native biodiversity in coastal areas. Since starting at the NNNSI, Joe has taken over management of a number of projects involving invasive species in Norfolk including implementing trials for the biological control of Himalayan balsam using a rust fungus, and starting to implement an intensive removal programme for Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed on the River Wensum.

If you have any rafts or traps you are no longer using please contact your Co-ordinator, who will be pleased to collect, clean and reuse them elsewhere. With evidence rapidly accumulating about the efficiency of trap monitoring devices, if you might consider purchasing and monitoring one yourself (costs from around £100) or donating one to the Project, please contact your co-ordinator. Also a reminder that all the latest information on the project, as well as the latest guidance documents, are available from our website.

A big thank you to all those who volunteer their time to help control mink from all of us involved with managing, financing and co-ordinating our Project. Together we have made huge inroads into the mink population in Norfolk, it might soon be time to see if we can eradicate them!

Simon Baker

Chair of the Steering Group and editor of the Newsletter

Joe Kenworthy

Lead Partner, Norfolk Non-native Species Initiative, Norfolk County Council

