American Mink (Neovison vison)

Species Identification

A semi-aquatic, generalist, highly adaptable, non native predator

**Head-body length:** 30-47cm (males larger than females)

**Tail Length:** 13-23cm (approximately ½ body length)

**Weight:** 0.5-1.5kg

**Fur:** Shiny, chocolate-brown appearing nearly black. Can occur in all shades of white, grey and brown however. Often has small white patch on chin / throat. Tail is bushy.

**Activity period:** Predominantly nocturnal but often seen during day

Ecology

**Habitat Description:** Mink are generalist predators which can live in terrestrial or aquatic habitats but which have a preference for linear aquatic habitats including rivers, streams, irrigation channels and estuaries where there is abundant vegetation to provide cover. Nesting sites include waterside burrows in tree roots or in old rabbit burrows. Nests are lined with dry vegetation, fur and feathers.

**Reproduction & Life Cycle:** Mating occurs Feb - April when territorial males become transient and mate with territorial females. After a gestation period of approximately 50 days, females give birth to between 4-6 kits that are weaned after 5-6 weeks. Juveniles disperse from their natal range in August - November. Female mink are capable of having two oestral periods in one year. Mink have a lifespan of up to 6 years in the wild.

**Dispersal and Spread:** Male and female mink exhibit intra-sexual territoriality outside of breeding season. Home ranges are approximately 1-3km (<5km) and are dependent on prey availability. Territories along watercourses are often linear. Dispersing juveniles form new territories up to 50km from their natal range.

Field Signs

**Scat:** 80-100mm long and <10mm wide. Twisted and pointed at one end, greenish brown/black with pungent odour. Frequently contains fur, feathers and bone. Found in conspicuous ‘territorial’ places

**Tracks:** Five toe pads splayed around palm pad in a star shape. Toe pads and claws often print together to form 'tear' shape, 20-40mm (width) x 25-40mm (length)
Impact

**Native Species:** American mink are opportunistic predators that can have a serious impact on ground-nesting birds and birds with burrows, small mammals and native mustelids of similar size. Studies have revealed that mink are a major threat to gull and tern colonies inhabiting offshore islands in Scotland. They are efficient predators of a range of water birds, especially moorhen, kingfisher, coot and mallard and have and have a serious impact on water vole populations. Their impact on natural fish, crustacean and bivalve populations is not known, however they can inflict serious damage at fisheries. Mink will surplus kill and can often cause nest sites of native species to be abandoned. Their impact on native fauna is often dependent on the extent and quality of habitat available for avoiding predation.

**Human Health Effects:** American mink have no reported effects on human health.

**Economic and Societal Effects:** Economic losses to fisheries and game bird farms resulting from mink predation have been documented throughout Europe. The cost of mink control and eradication to farming and conservation sectors is large with most eradication programmes requiring ongoing and labour intensive control. Territorial animals will immediately ‘fill’ gaps created by predator control once this control stops. Mink are territorial and will fight with domestic animals if threatened.

Legislation

This non native species is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act in England and Wales (1981 as amended) as an offence to release or allow the escape of this species into the wild. Once trapped, it is illegal to release a mink. There are however legal restrictions to ensure that all mink once caught are dispatched as humanely as possible.

[Two Mink chasing each other at Weir Wood reservoir © D Washington (Friends of Weir Wood)](image)
American Mink (*Neovison vison*)

**Management Approaches**

**Prevention Methods - Early detection and rapid response in vulnerable areas**

1. Map the distribution of all known populations
2. Identify likely territories of mapped individuals and areas that are ‘at risk’ to new invasions from young seeking new territories:
   - Along connecting waterways
   - Fisheries within ranging area of known individuals
   - Game bird farms within floodzone
   - Nature reserves within floodzone
3. Use GIS and local knowledge to map likely migration and colonisation routes
4. Implement a management plan to reduce mink numbers in vulnerable areas including:
   - Managing extant populations along major migration routes and in / near vulnerable sites (such as major water vole colonies) to prevent further dispersal
   - Where possible, providing training for landowners and gamekeepers on appropriate mink control
   - Increase public awareness to improve accuracy and frequency of sightings to allow for rapid eradication
   - Monitoring ‘at risk’ sites to enable fast eradication if invasion occurs

**Eradication, Control and monitoring effects**

The eradication of mink requires a coordinated approach across whole catchments / landscapes, which can also be achieved by many small scale projects resulting in regional control. Mink numbers can be significantly reduced by implementing a systematic approach followed by annual monitoring and control. **Please note that it is illegal to drown or hunt mink using**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Time of Year</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Traps</td>
<td>Live cage traps fitted with ‘otter exclusion guard’ placed along the banks of well vegetated watercourses where mink are likely to be active</td>
<td>Jan / Feb &amp; Sept / Oct equating to &gt;3 months trapping effort</td>
<td>Labour intensive but commonly practised by gamekeepers. Requires stakeholder engagement throughout catchment. Licenses are required for shooting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mink Rafts</td>
<td>Place GWCT Mink Rafts at 1-2km intervals along waterways, securing them to the bank. Monitor rafts for mink activity, once activity is confirmed, place either a: 1) spring trap or a 2) live cage trap (with otter guard) inside the tunnel. Place exclusion poles on the rafts to limit activity of non-target species such as otter.</td>
<td>Jan / Feb &amp; Sept / Oct equating to &gt;3 months trapping effort</td>
<td>Labour intensive and access limitations 1) Spring traps will impact on non-target species 2) Live cage traps require daily checking but limit the impact on non-target species. Dispatch of captured mink is a legal requirement and guns should be licensed. Placing mink rafts on watercourses requires permission from the Environment Agency.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raft Monitoring</td>
<td>Monitor mink activity post trapping to identify settlement of new individuals</td>
<td>Prior to trapping (above)</td>
<td>Initial labour costs, but significantly reduces labour cost of trapping.</td>
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<td>Biological Control</td>
<td>Improve riparian habitat to improve cover for threatened fauna and to encourage settlement from otters which can outcompete mink.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Stakeholder objection to habitat enhancement. Expensive but will improve overall biodiversity.</td>
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**Contacts**

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<tr>
<td>Sussex Wildlife Trust (Wetlands Project)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sussexwt.org.uk">www.sussexwt.org.uk</a> 01273 497555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural England</td>
<td>0845 600 3078 <a href="mailto:enquiries.southeast@naturalengland.org.uk">enquiries.southeast@naturalengland.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust</td>
<td><a href="http://www.gwct.org.uk">www.gwct.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wildcall Advice Line</td>
<td>(01273) 494777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment Agency</td>
<td>Ask for Fisheries &amp; Biodiversity or Land Drainage consent teams 03708 506506 <a href="http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk">www.environment-agency.gov.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mammal Society</td>
<td><a href="http://www.mammal.org.uk">www.mammal.org.uk</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Assoc. for Shooting &amp; Conservation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.basc.org.uk">www.basc.org.uk</a></td>
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**References & Further Reading**

- **Sussex Wildlife Trust.** Mink Control: Best Practice for Wildlife Conservation. Available online at [www.sussexwt.org.uk](http://www.sussexwt.org.uk);

Sussex wetlands project promotes the sustainable management of rivers and the restoration of wetland habitats for people and wildlife