



get in **VOLE**ved

The Newsletter of the BBOWT Mammal Project February 2023

2022 Water Vole Survey Results

Thank you to everyone who undertook water vole surveys in 2022, including several of you who signed up to vole-unteer for the first time. With your help, we surveyed 321 500 m survey sections, totalling around 160 km of waterways!

This year's results have revealed that there continues to be a water vole stronghold on the lower River Windrush in West Oxfordshire, indeed the number of positive survey sections recorded has noticeably increased to a reassuring 89%, up from 52% in 2019. Some of us were lucky enough to even see a water vole during one of the group survey events.

The populations on the River Cole and Tuckmill Brook appear to have remained fairly stable, but density remains low and less activity was seen in some areas. On the Oxford Canal, the small remnant population remains adjacent to the Trap Grounds, and water voles were also recorded east of Yarnton although, as in previous years, activity was low. Elsewhere in Oxfordshire, it was very encouraging to record water voles on the smaller channels through Iffley Meadows Nature Reserve and on the River Thames at Abingdon for the first time in many years. Similarly, water voles were recorded on the Portobello Ditch, the previous 2017 surveys having been negative. Sadly, the nearby Cow Common Brook remains negative.

In Buckinghamshire the water vole population on the lower River Misbourne remains stable and voles were also recorded through east Buckingham (Great Ouse) for the first time.

Unfortunately West Berkshire has seen a decline in water vole activity, in line with an increase in mink sightings in the area. Hungerford, which had previously been a hotspot had very little activity in 2022 and on the River Dun occupancy fell from 72% in 2017 to 54%. In recent years the population on the Kennet & Avon Canal has also been steadily declining and the number of positive surveys

Table 1. Summary of the 2022 survey results (colour coding denotes watercourses within the same Local Key Area for targeted water vole conservation)

Watercourse	Surveys		
	Positive	Negative	Total
Berkshire			
River Dun	7	6	13
Kennet & Avon Canal	7	46	53
River Pang	0	4	4
River Thames tributaries at Cookham	5	7	12
Buckinghamshire			
Great Ouse	1	9	10
River Misbourne and River Colne	8	8	16
Oxfordshire			
Oxford Canal	3	18	21
Cow Common Brook	0	13	13
Portobello Ditch	3	3	6
Woodhill Brook	1	3	4
River Thames at Abingdon	5	16	21
Pumney Ditch	0	10	10
Hinksey Stream & Weirs Mill Stream	4	2	6
River Windrush	42	5	47
River Cole	17	24	41
Tuckmill Brook	9	5	14
Kingstone Brook	0	6	6
River Evenlode	0	2	2
Mill Brook	13	2	15
Uffington Stream	4	3	7

notably dropped from 30% in 2020 to just 13% in 2022. Again this is believed to be due to the presence of mink. Elsewhere in Berkshire, the project helped to monitor two sites in Cookham where water voles were re-introduced by the Wild Cookham group. The good news was that so far the populations are persisting, despite occasional reports of mink in the area.



A water vole in East Hanney
© Paul Jeffery, August 2022

American Mink Monitoring and Control

Fifty-two mink were trapped during the most recent control season (July 2021 – June 2022). This is similar to the previous season (59), with the highest numbers of mink trapped around Wokingham, Theale and Avington in Berkshire, Goring, Abingdon, Dorchester, Otmoor and west of Burford in Oxfordshire, and Drayton Beachamp near Tring in Buckinghamshire. The use of [Remoti mink trap alarms](#) has greatly facilitated mink trapping and we are hopeful for funding to purchase and distribute more of these devices.

Help Stop the Spread of Invasive Aquatic Species

American mink are not the only non-native species which we need to worry about along our waterways. Hundreds of other species have been introduced (often from garden ponds). Some of the worst offenders to watch out for during water vole surveys are [floating pennywort](#) (particularly problematic in the River Colne catchment such as the River Chess and River Misbourne, and the River Thames between Reading and Henley), [Himalayan balsam](#) (especially on the upper River Thames in West Oxfordshire and on the Letcombe Brook), [New Zealand pigmyweed](#), [water primrose](#), [parrot's feather](#) and [water fern](#). Please do your part to help prevent the spread of these species by following guidance from the 'check, clean, dry' campaign. **Check** and thoroughly brush down, wash and **Clean** your footwear, clothing and wading pole, removing any organisms, and then ensure you **Dry** them before the next use. If you do find any invasive species, please record them on the [iRecord App](#).



Water Vole Survey Events

There are three survey refresher events for existing surveyors scheduled for the start of this year's survey season. These events are good opportunities to refresh your field skills as well as to meet other surveyors. Please let us know if you would like to attend one of the sessions and we will send joining instructions. If you are unable to make the dates below but are keen to brush up your field skills then please get in touch as it may be possible to join us or another experienced surveyor on a survey.

Saturday 1st April 10:00 – 13:00
River Windrush, Witney

Sunday 2nd April 10:00 – 13:00
Latimer, River Chess

Sunday 16th April 10:00 – 13:00
River Windrush, Witney

Badger Vaccination Update

In 2022, we successfully vaccinated 49 badgers against bovine TB in West Berkshire and at various sites in Oxfordshire. An impressive 25 of these badgers were trapped at Chimney Meadows Nature Reserve, a record for this site. Owing to the exceptionally dry summer we found it easier to coax badgers into the traps with peanuts, since their natural food sources of worms and slugs were harder to come by. It was rewarding to vaccinate a large number of cubs in early summer, however individuals were noticeably thinner as the drought continued. A special thanks to Martin, Tom, Ewan and Jed for helping with the badger pre-baiting and trapping once again. We have recently had the final year of funding to vaccinate in West Berkshire under the Badger Edge Vaccination Scheme (BEVS 2) confirmed, after which DEFRA plan to move to a model of farmer-led badger vaccination schemes.

Become a Wildlife Ambassador

Lastly, we'd like to take this opportunity to share a message from our colleague Nicky Warden about the opportunity to [become a Wildlife Ambassador](#): *"As a BBOWT volunteer we know that you are passionate about nature and you are already helping to protect and enhance your local environment to benefit wildlife and people. However, there are many ways of making change happen and one of these is to lobby your local representative in person and/or in writing. Developing a relationship with your local politicians can be very effective and remember they are there to represent you – it is their job to listen to you! If you are interested in helping wildlife by lobbying your MP and/or local councillors, please join our community of around 700 Wildlife Ambassadors and we will send you suggested actions, including advice about what you can include in your communications. You can find detailed resources [on our website](#) including step by step guides to help you speak up for wildlife and make your campaigning voice heard."*

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