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The Newsletter of the BBOWT Mammal Project *March 2019*

2018 Water Vole survey results

An impressive total of **336** sections of our waterways were surveyed in 2018, covering over 168 km of watercourse. This table shows a breakdown of the completed surveys, colouring indicates watercourses in the same catchment. As always, a massive **Thank you** to all our volunteer surveyors who play such a vital role in helping us to monitor the progress of our local water vole populations and to all landowners who gave us permission to survey.

Sadly this year saw further negative surveys where several of our small and vulnerable water vole colonies have been recorded in recent years. Some of these sites have now not had water voles recorded for over 5 years and so will fall off our survey programme. On a positive note, it was fantastic to identify a previously unrecorded water vole population around the village of Uffington in West Oxfordshire.

Mink remain a real problem for water voles locally, last year 202 mink rafts were in use in the 3 counties and 103 mink were trapped. If you are interested in helping with mink control or you currently monitor a mink raft and require a replacement raft or fresh clay for the tracking pad then please get in touch.

Watercourse	Surveys		
	Positive	Negative	Total
Berkshire			
Holy Brook	0	8	8
Hurst Ditches	0	4	4
Kennet & Avon Canal	11	27	38
River Kennet	37	27	64
River Lambourn	0	23	23
Buckinghamshire			
River Colne	1	0	1
River Misbourne	6	10	16
Oxfordshire			
Bayswater Brook	0	7	7
Ewelme Stream	0	3	3
Clanfield Brook	0	3	3
River Cole	23	17	40
River Windrush	32	15	47
Upper Thames	0	6	6
Oxford Canal	2	14	16
Ginge Brook	0	28	28
Pumney Ditch	0	9	9
Radley Brook	0	4	4
Sandford Brook	2	0	2
River Thames- Abingdon	0	11	11
Uffington Stream	4	2	6
Total	118	218	336

Welcome to Lucy, the new project Field Officer

We are very pleased to welcome Lucy Stoddart to the team in the role of Mammal Project Field Officer. Lucy will be continuing the fantastic work carried out by Gavin Bennett and will be responsible for delivering the Mammal Project's field work including water vole surveys and mink control, badger surveys and vaccinations. Lucy has been a BBOWT Wildlife Trainee at College Lake for the past 6 months and prior to that has worked conserving water voles on the Norfolk and Cambridgeshire Fens. Lucy will be a great addition to the team and I'm sure many of you will have the opportunity to work with and meet her over the coming year.



Prize-winning river enhancement work in Bucks

2018 saw the successful completion of our enhancement work for water voles on the lower River Misbourne at Denham in south Bucks. With support from the Environment Agency, Buckinghamshire County Council, Groundwork South and the Wild Trout Trust, we undertook substantial work to enhance the river for water voles and other wildlife. This included protecting river banks from erosion, improving flow in-channel, reinstating an historic backwater and removing excess tree cover to allow vegetation to develop. We used cut timber to create 'dead hedges' to prevent people and dogs from accessing sensitive areas of bank but were keen to ensure that people could still enjoy the stream and so incorporated plans for a formal access beach along 20m of river outside the visitor centre at Denham Country Park. The gravel beach is an area where the public and school groups can safely access the water with minimal disturbance to wildlife and, having already hosted pond dipping and model boat racing events, it should be a fantastic resource for many years to come. We were delighted to receive national recognition when the enhancement project was runner-up in the 'Natural Environment' category of the Canal & River Trust's Living Waterways Awards 2018.



Badger vaccination update

Vaccinating badgers against bovine tuberculosis (TB) has been proven to reduce the prevalence of disease in badger populations and reduce the risk of transmission of TB to livestock. With support from DEFRA we were able to expand our vaccination work in West Berkshire in 2018 and we successfully trapped and vaccinated badgers over a 20km² area around Greenham Common. We also continued with our long-term vaccination scheme at BBOWT's Chimney Meadows nature reserve in west Oxfordshire. The badgers seemed especially easy to trap last summer, perhaps due to the very dry conditions and a lack of food. In particular their favourite snack of earthworms was not easy to come by in the dry, hard ground. In total we vaccinated **55** badgers and we look forward to continuing and expanding our work in 2019.

Find out more about the Wildlife Trust's vaccination schemes and other measures that we advocate for helping to prevent the spread of bovine TB at: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/wildlife-and-wild-places/saving-species/badgers/solution>

Water vole survey events on our rare chalk streams

We have two water vole group survey events planned for the start of the survey season on our chalk streams in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. These are a great opportunity to refresh your field skills and meet other surveyors, please let us know if you would like to sign up to take part. If you are unable to make the dates but are keen to accompany us on a survey to refresh your field skills then please do get in touch.

Saturday 4th May 10.00- 13.00: River Ock, Abingdon

Meet at Tescos car park in Abingdon to help survey the lower River Ock for water voles and also look out for signs of otters.

Sunday 12th May 10.00- 13.00: River Chess, Latimer

Meet at Latimer Park, near Chesham, to help monitor one of the last remaining water vole populations in Buckinghamshire. The survey will be carried out in partnership with the River Chess Association and the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project.

Contact us: Julia Lofthouse, Mammal Project Manager, email: julialofthouse@bbowt.org.uk

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