

Hebridean farmers: Fewer mink, more rats

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An effort to rid the Outer Hebrides of Scotland of mink to protect nesting seabirds has caused rats to become more plentiful, farmers on the islands say.

The mink were descended from animals that escaped from fur farms. They are believed to have been cleared from at least four islands, North and South Uist, Benbecula and Barra.

"We definitely notice the difference since they started cracking down on the mink; there are a lot more rats around and they are a menace," Donald MacLeod told The Scotsman. "No one liked the mink very much, but they did help in keeping the rats down."

Iain MacLeod, manager of the Scottish Natural Heritage's Hebridean Mink Project, said rats are not as destructive as mink. He said the best way to keep them down is to store animal feed in rat-proof containers.

Commercial mink farms were established on Lewis in the 1950s and 1960s. Escaped mink reproduced and spread through the Hebrides with experts estimating the population at about 10,000 at its height.

Mink are carnivores and eat eggs, chicks and adult birds.

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