

Mink control vital to save water voles

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Water voles are one of the UK's most endangered mammals

(PhysOrg.com) -- Keeping water vole and mink populations apart is vital if efforts to reintroduce water voles, one of Britain's most endangered mammals, are to be successful.

The finding was one of many made by Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (the WildCRU) reported in this year's State of Britain's Mammals report, co-authored by the WildCRU's Professor David Macdonald and Dr Dawn Burnham.

The Oxford researchers also found that the quantity of streamside vegetation had a big impact on the survival and growth of reintroduced water vole populations.

Water vole numbers have been in decline for over 20 years due to more

intensive agricultural practises, infrastructure development, and predation by the American mink. In April 2008 the water vole received additional legal protection in order to boost its chances of survival.

Elsewhere in the report WildCRU researchers examined the best way of controlling the American mink, which is having a significant impact on populations of native British birds and water voles. Their work suggests that only constant monitoring and targeted trapping of the animals and the creation of ‘mink free zones’ will enable native species to recover.

In the report the WildCRU team also discussed how feral cat populations could be managed to ensure that the 400-strong population of Scottish wildcats does not disappear and how the extinct Eurasian lynx might be reintroduced in Scotland and northern England.

The report, *The State of Britain’s Mammals 2008*, is due to be published by the People’s Trust for Endangered Species later this month.

Provided by Oxford University

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