

Whiskers hold secrets of invasive minks

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Details of the lifestyle of mink, which escaped from fur farms and now live wild in the UK, have been revealed through analysis of their whiskers. Research led by the University of Exeter reveals more about the diet of this invasive species and provides a clue to its whereabouts. There are now plans to use the findings to eradicate it from environments where it can be devastating to native species.

Published in the *Journal of Applied Ecology*, the study focused on American mink living in the Outer Hebrides, Scotland. The scientists used stable isotope analysis to study the whiskers and claws of mink carcasses collected on the islands. This technique generates a kind of unique chemical fingerprint, providing a record of an animal's diet over time. The results showed that the mink had been increasingly reliant on seafood, proving to the scientists that mink had started to move to the coastline around the islands.

Wildlife biologists from the Food and Environment Research Agency have been working to eradicate mink, which escaped from fur farms and now live wild on the Outer Hebrides. Having successfully eradicated mink from two islands - Uist and Harris - the team now plans to use the research findings to manage populations across the Outer Hebrides. As a result of the study, the team will focus future efforts on coastal regions.

The American mink is a predator that has a devastating effect on many native UK species, including water voles and other mammals, fish and seabirds. The first American mink were brought to British fur farms in 1929 and all wild mink in Britain today are descendants of escapees.

Dr Thomas Bodey of the University of Exeter said: "The American Mink is one of the most damaging invasive species living in the UK today and sadly it has a devastating effect on UK wildlife. We were astonished at how much we could find out by analysing the claws and whiskers of the [mink](#) and are delighted to know that our results are helping manage this problem in the Outer Hebrides."

Provided by University of Exeter

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