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The Newsletter of the BBOWT's Mammal Project *March 2017*

2016 Water Vole survey results

During the 2016 surveying season a total of 364 survey stretches were surveyed by BBOWT staff and volunteers. This represents over 180km of waterways within the three counties! A breakdown of the surveys completed is in the table below.

	Number of surveys
Project Officer	43
Project Assistant	157
Volunteer Surveyors	79
BBOWT's Conservation Trainee Team	85
Total	364

The 2016 survey results were largely positive with vole activity being found across most of the surveyed Local Key Areas (LKAs). Sadly no evidence of water voles was found on the River Glyme, suggesting that this reintroduced population may have been lost. Of the 364 survey completed 147 were positive and 217 negative.

Following recent trends, our larger water vole populations remained stable or expanded whilst the smaller more isolated populations continued to dwindle. Excitingly our survey efforts this year revealed a link between water voles on the River Cole and River Thames and the population on the River Windrush – these have now joined up to form the Upper Thames LKA covering a whopping 192km²! The Mill Brook water voles bucked the trend seen elsewhere by increasing from 12km² to 20km², a welcome boost for a historically small population. Overall the coverage of Local Key Areas increased by 2.5% in 2016, from 566km² to 580km². We will continue to work this year to help keep our water vole populations viable and facilitate their spread into new areas. **You can read the full suite of reports from the 2016 season at:** <https://goo.gl/oxilfM>

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 through their land.

Badger work update

Following a successful season of badger vaccinations in 2015, sadly due to a shortage of BCG vaccine for humans we were unable to continue our vaccination work in 2016. This year we are looking in to sourcing our own vaccine from an alternative supplier whilst DEFRA work towards securing vaccine for the 2018 season via the normal route.



The Wildlife Trusts continue to oppose the government's policy of badger culling and over the last few months have supported Simon King's petition to the government to end the badger cull. Having secured over 100,000 signatures, the issue will now be [debated in parliament on 27th March 2017](#).

Recently we have been assisting Surrey University with a research project into the instance of TB in badgers across our 3 counties. The project hopes to assess the level and strain of infection in our local badgers using road-killed animals. For the next few months we are on the lookout for safely accessible, freshly killed and whole badgers on roads in Berks, Buck and Oxon. They must be retrieved using a special kit so please do pass sightings of carcasses our way so we can collect them. For more information on the project visit: <https://goo.gl/j565n9>

Mink control update

During the 2016 mink control season (July 2015 – June 2016) a total of 61 mink were trapped and removed from our waterways, over double that trapped the previous year! Extra efforts we directed into increasing the numbers of rafts in and around our water vole sites. By the end of the season we were co-ordinating 136 rafts, compared to 103 in 2015. Over the last few months we have been busy finding new locations for rafts across the 3 counties and have installed a further 30 rafts to bring our current total in March 2017 to 167 rafts. One of our new rafts near Abingdon has produced 10 mink over the last 3 months showing just how many mink can be occupying a relatively small area.

Many of our Local Key areas are still under protected and we are seeking new locations for rafts as well as new landowners and volunteers to get involved. If you are interested in getting involved or know someone who you think might be please put them in touch with us direct. Our mink monitoring information can be found online here: <https://goo.gl/dwxz4i>

We are especially interested to hear from any landowners big or small wishing to have mink monitoring rafts on their land, perhaps you have a stream in your back garden that may be suitable or live near a farm with watercourses where you could monitor a raft?

Water vole displacement study update

Dr Merryl Gelling of the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit at Oxford University has been trapping and radio collaring water voles to investigate the effects of vegetation removal on their movements. After helping to identify sites where the research could be undertaken, the Mammal Project team had the rare opportunity to get up close to some water voles during a morning of live trapping. Merryl has now finished her fieldwork and is currently analysing the data. She will be presenting her findings at the [Mammal Society's spring conference](#) and they will be used to influence future mitigation guidelines.



Water vole group surveys

We have several water vole group survey events planned for the start of the survey season, these are a great opportunity to refresh your field survey skills as well as to help us collect valuable data. Please do come along if you can! Each event should be finished by 12.30pm. Please get in touch if you would like further details and to sign up to help.

Sunday 2nd April: Meet 10.00am at the Beansheaf Centre, Linear Park, Calcot, Berkshire
Help us survey the reeded balancing ponds to monitor this small and vulnerable water vole population

Sunday 9th April: Meet 10.00am west Abingdon, Oxfordshire
Help us survey the lower River Ock, check a mink raft and look out for signs of otters too

Saturday 29th April: Meet 10.00am at Latimer Park, Buckinghamshire
Help us survey the River Chess chalk stream, home to one of the last remaining water vole populations in Bucks

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