



## Volunteer Role Outline

<b>Role title:</b>
Water Vole Surveyor
<b>Based at location</b> (please indicate if disabled access is available):
Water vole surveys may be carried out at various watercourses or waterbodies across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Please note that survey sites within Buckinghamshire, East Berkshire and North Oxfordshire are limited due to the low abundance of water vole populations in these areas. If you live within these areas but are still keen to volunteer, then please let us know how far you may be willing to travel.
<b>Purpose of the role:</b>
<p>The water vole is one of Britain's fastest declining native mammals and therefore accurate data and mapping is vital for monitoring and conserving the species. Established in 1998, BBOWT's Water Vole Recovery Project is the longest standing project of its kind and we are proud to contribute to the survival and recovery of such a charismatic species.</p> <p>Each year, the Project surveys approximately 250 km of watercourse across the three counties, and this wouldn't be possible without our dedicated team of volunteers who help collect reliable water vole survey data.</p> <p>The valuable data collected through bankside surveys is used to map the distribution of water voles within the three counties and feeds into the National Water Vole Database &amp; Mapping Project. The mapped data enables the project to predict where water voles are and where they are likely to disperse, and whether existing populations can be reconnected. In turn, this data enables targeted conservation such as sympathetic habitat management, habitat restoration, reintroductions and effective American mink control.</p> <p>The data collected through these surveys is also shared with Local Environmental Records Centres to inform local planning and ensure that water voles are considered in the development process.</p>
<b>Type of work you will be involved in:</b>
If you are interested in carrying out water vole surveys for the Project you will be invited to attend a survey training or refresher event in the Spring. Once you have attended the training you will be asked to survey three 500 m sections of watercourse within the three counties (we will never say no to more if you are particularly keen). The duration of each survey varies a lot but on average each section should take 1-2 hours to cover and therefore it should be possible to survey your 3 contiguous sites in one full day.

Each survey involves walking along the bank or water's edge of the mapped survey section, carefully searching for the field signs that indicate water vole presence, such as droppings, latrines, feeding signs and burrows. If you are very lucky, you may even catch a glimpse of a water vole!

We provide all surveyors with the relevant training, survey forms, maps, survey guidelines and risk assessments in order for you to carry out the surveys. Whilst completing the survey form we ask that you map any water vole, otter, rat and field vole field signs, as well as the habitat within 50 m of the water using the codes and symbols provided.

Volunteers are required to conduct their surveys from the bank or the edge of the channel, only entering water where levels do not exceed wellington boot height. BBOWT unfortunately cannot permit surveying by wading-in-channel or by boat due to health and safety reasons and since these methods are not covered by our insurance policy.

Generally speaking, the majority of the survey sections assigned to volunteers will already have permission granted for by the respective landowners (unless they are public access such as canal towpaths) and therefore there would be no need for you to contact a landowner. However, on occasion the landowner(s) may request that you let them know when you will be going on site prior to the survey. We will inform you if this is the case but please do let us know if you would rather not be asked to contact a landowner.

**Experience &/or qualifications needed:**

A good level of physical fitness is required due to the nature of scrambling up and down banks and for walking approximately 500 m and back per survey section. Volunteers are not expected to have any prior survey experience or qualifications (although wonderful if you do); however, we do ask that you attend a survey training or refresher event or accompany BBOWT staff on a survey prior to undertaking your own surveys. This is to ensure that data collection is standardised and that volunteers are familiar with the survey techniques as well as how to complete our survey forms.

**Times/days we would like you to be available** (flexibility is often possible):

Surveys should be carried out at your convenience between late March and late September (although some surveys may still be undertaken in October and early November depending on the weather). You should avoid surveying after or during heavy rain when field signs may have been washed away or during spells of particularly cold weather.

**Benefits to volunteer & possible training opportunities:**

The Water Vole Recovery Project leads annual group survey events every spring (usually late March-April) which offer volunteers a chance to refresh their survey skills and an opportunity to meet like-minded people. As well as learning about water vole field signs, these group survey events will cover other riparian mammal signs such as otter, mink, field vole and rat.

The Project sends an annual *Get InVOLVEd* newsletter summarising the survey findings and highlighting any other mammal-related news that we think may be of interest.

Surveying for the Project provides opportunities to visit and explore new places which you might otherwise not have a reason to visit, such as private land, canal footpaths and nature reserves.

**You will be responsible to:**

We ask that volunteers dedicate approximately one day to surveying each year between March and September.

We may occasionally ask that volunteers contact landowners prior to undertaking their surveys.

Volunteers are responsible for providing accurate survey records in the form of fully completed survey sheets with annotated maps. This information allows us to monitor local water vole populations and may also be used to advise landowners on habitat management or to inform environmental or engineering works such as bankside footpath maintenance or dredging.

Volunteers are asked to send in their completed water vole survey forms by the deadline provided at the end of the season (August-September). This is to ensure that the data is logged and the survey findings can be shared with landowners, partner organisations and Environmental Records Centres in good time.

We hope that you are encouraged to volunteer your time with us and hope to hear from you soon.

With kindest regards,

The Mammal Team

**Expenses payable:**

Not applicable

**Interview, References or DBS check required:**

Not applicable