

STRATEGIC MINK CONTROL IN NORTH SCOTLAND

Newsletter No. 1

January 2011



FANTASTIC NEWS!

RAFTS recently gained knowledge that the funding applications submitted have been successful! Over £900k of funding and in-kind support has been secured from the University of Aberdeen, Scottish Natural Heritage, 12 Fisheries Trusts, The Tubney Charitable Trust, the Scottish Government and European Community Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Rural Aberdeenshire and Rural Tayside Local Action Groups LEADER 2007-2013 Programme

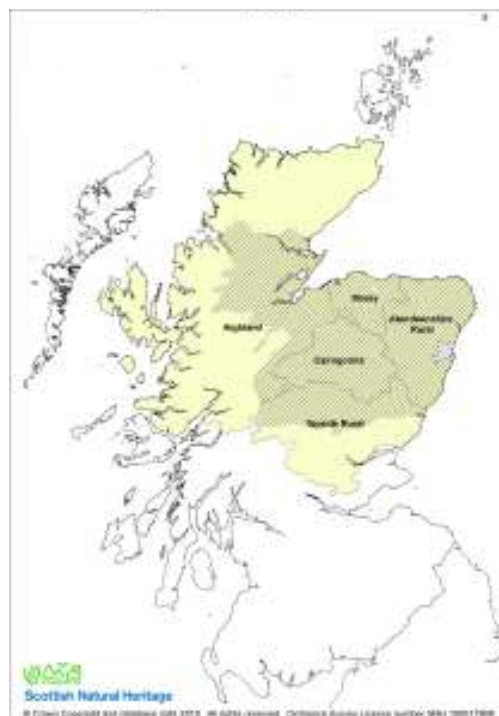
We now have one of (if not, the) largest invasive species control projects in the world! Thank you to all our volunteers who provided letters of support, we could not have achieved this without you.

The new project commences January 2011 but will not be fully staffed until April, until then Sarah Atkinson and Helen Gray will be able to assist with any queries. Helen won't be working in January, but we do have stores across the area, which you can collect kit from - details later on. We have had to say good-bye to Lois Canham, NW Highlands Project Officer as she is off to pastures new, working in ecological consultancy.

As part of the new project we are sending all volunteers and landowners forms to complete giving consent to having mink rafts and traps on their land and so we have a record of raft locations and who monitors them. These will be posted out in the coming weeks. They are not compulsory to complete, but it would greatly help our record keeping and these forms will be held in the strictest confidence.

The map shows the five LEADER areas in north Scotland (named) and the area the project will cover in grey.

This project will build on the experiences learnt in the previous water vole and mink projects and will continue to expand on this work.





Trapping in winter?

Some people are able to continue their trapping in winter, which is great! but it can be arduous in snowy weather. [To increase your chances of catching any mink we recommend baiting the trap during winter. Mixing salt into the clay mix also reduces freezing temperature and makes it possible to continue monitoring despite frost](#)

Mink, like all animals are on a tight energy budget spending all their spare time searching for food in winter, so much more likely to encounter and enter a trap with fish



North East Update- Sarah Atkinson

[I would like to start by saying thank you to all my volunteers for their kind wishes and assistance during my recovery from injury over the summer. I have now made a full recovery and have been out and about over the autumn, assisting in trapping during the juvenile dispersal- until the recent snow falls and freezing temperatures!](#)

There has been a few more captures on the River Ythan, but no evidence of any breeding and the number of immigrants is lower than last year which is a good sign. Further signs of water voles have also been seen- which is fantastic news! However, a suspected sign of a dispersing mink up near Rothienorman, indicating that vigilance is still needed even when it appears an area has no mink.

[The River Ugie between Mintlaw and Peterhead is being emptied of mink - with a total of 13 mink caught since April! More work is still needed on this catchment; please get in touch if you are able to help. Sarah is also giving a community talk with a full update on our progress on Tuesday 18th January at the Loch of Strathbeg visitors centre starting at 7pm. Refreshments available, all welcome.](#)

There has been fewer captures on the River Dee this autumn, with evidence of one litter having escaped our attention (for at time!). High river levels have also affected trapping efforts. However, four mink were caught on the Muchalls burn near Stonehaven, well within mink dispersal reach of mink from neighbouring catchments. I suspect these arrived through coastal dispersal.

Even though it is early days and we are from having achieved full coverage on the River Don a few mink have been caught across the catchment. Jamie Urquhart- former NE Project Officer- has set 10 new rafts around Sauchen. There are still a lot of sightings around Inverurie and Kintore, and higher up the River Urie. [We will fully tackle the Don this year so as to dry up the supply of dispersers. If you would like to get involved working in this area please contact Sarah.](#)





Cairngorms area update- Helen Gray

Spey It has been a quieter autumn for the Spey this year demonstrating that trapping efforts in the Spring lower down in the catchment have paid off. The main activity was at Glenlivet where two mink were caught by dedicated volunteers whose vigilance paid off. These mink are thought to be juveniles making their way up from an undetected litter around the main stem of the Spey at Ballindalloch. [An appeal has been made for more help around Ballindalloch and another problematic mink tributary, the Fiddich.](#) Two male mink were also caught at Rothiemurchus and one on the Dulnain where there had been no signs on rafts for almost a year, showing that the raft system can work if volunteers continue to check rafts. Unfortunately raft checking had to be stopped early due to frozen conditions but conditions are ideal for snow tracking, please see the website for more information on footprints.

Tay As expected given our partial coverage of this catchment, mink have been caught on the main stem of the Tay by the ghillies at Kinnaird and Dalmarnock which has helped reduce activity higher up the catchment. However, mink sightings were reported on the Tummel this year and on the Tay at Aberfeldy so we are looking forward to concentrating our efforts in this area in the Spring time with new rafts and new volunteers on board. [Mink have been caught all year round between Blairgowrie and Kirriemuir so we are looking for volunteers to enable us to concentrate efforts on the River Ericht above Blairgowrie](#) once the winter has passed with it's inevitable snow melt floods. As the Tay is on the southern boundary of the project it is not unexpected we will continue to get dispersers coming through from time to time.



Marshall Halliday & Nigel McMullan- Esk Rivers Trust.

We have 7 rafts located on the River Bervie- to date we have had 2 mink captures. These traps will continue to be monitored and reset this coming spring 2011. Around Montrose Basin, River South Esk, we have been able to get mink rafts operational and to date have had 6 mink captures. They were captured where the River South Esk enters Montrose Basin (at Old Montrose Pier area). Hopefully this success will continue this coming year. We have also been able to locate mink rafts on the River Lunan and at present we have had 9 captures. These captures have been around the Boysock area. We hope this effort will result in the removal of breeding mink from the catchment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Adam McClure, SWT Ranger, Montrose Basin, and Richard Averis, Angus Council Ranger, Montrose Basin, Mike Hardy, Gamekeeper, Lunan Water and Doug, Gamekeeper, Glenbervie Estate, for their continued help and success this year.



North West Highlands- Lois Canham

During 2010 there were some signs of mink north of Ullapool. It is not known if these are dispersers or a breeding population of mink and we are investigating. Many Estates in the area continue to set traps for mink and we expect they will eventually be caught, with one already being caught near Kylesku.

On a more positive note, a number of mink have been caught over the rest of the project area. Notably, six mink were caught on the Little Gruinard and a further six on and around Isle of Ewe on the West coast. Mink continue to be caught on the Conon, Beaully & Ness catchments towards the eastern area, although the north west Highlands is far from complete and there is much work to be done in the coming years.

I want to thank everyone who has volunteered with the mink project, without your time and effort there would be no project! I am going to continue monitoring rafts as a volunteer around my house in Dornoch, so that I can stay involved with the project, and I am sure I will see many of you again in my future work.

If you need to contact me personally my email is lois_canham@hotmail.com. If you want to contact the project before April, please email Sarah Atkinson at s.a.atkinson@abdn.ac.uk or telephone 07899 060 569. As soon as the new project officer has been appointed in April, they will be in contact with you to introduce themselves and give you their new contact details.

Wishing you all the best for 2011



Scientific journal publication of the project's work

Staff from the project have worked tirelessly over the past few years to collect data. This can be then analysed and used to inform our work and improve our management strategies. Recently, this work was published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal *Biological Conservation*. If you would like an electronic or printed copy of this paper, please contact Prof. Xavier Lambin, from the University of Aberdeen (x.lambin@abdn.ac.uk), or via your local project officer.

Some of the key points we have learnt from this data:

- By December 2009, there was evidence that 10,000km² of the North East and Cairngorms was free of breeding mink, and this is constantly expanding. Taking into consideration the 4590km² Isabela Island goat eradication project, we now have one of the largest control projects in the world.
- It has also become clear that the level of mink activity within a single sub-catchment was affected by the level of mink control in the remainder of that river catchment- vigilance is key when it comes to mink control!

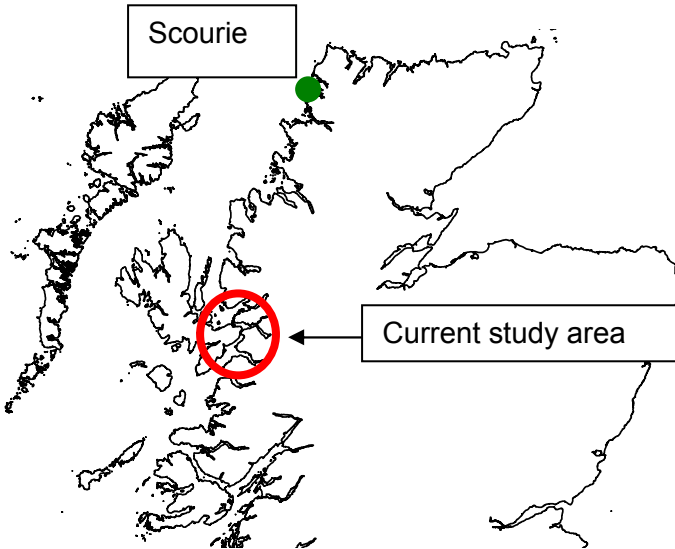


Elaine Fraser, Mink PhD on the West Coast-

In August I began setting up a field study site in the Lochalsh area of west Scotland to optimise mink management strategies in coastal environment. I have set up 4 transects of mink rafts and monitoring tunnels to observe mink presence in coastal regions compared with inland rivers and lochs. Most of my sites are on estates owned by the National Trust for Scotland (NTS). NTS rangers and other local volunteers are also kindly helping me to check the raft and tunnel sites.

I have had positive mink signs on 6 occasions at 5 sites so far. These sites are a mixture of coastal tunnels and inland rafts with the furthest inland positive site being approximately 3km from the sea. I am not doing any trapping at the moment because I want to first monitor the presence and distribution of mink in the area. In the New Year I plan to set up more field sites to replicate the study site I already have. I will eventually trap in these areas to get mink carcasses to firstly analyse the diet of west coast mink and to secondly analyse the relatedness of mink populations (using genetic techniques) to try and work out routes of mink dispersal in Scotland.

I am interested in any mink sightings that people have, and also in collecting any carcasses of mink caught, from the west coast around Skye and Gairloch.



Mink sighting at Scourie

Quite concerningly, a mink was sighted and caught at Scourie, not far from Durness. This is much further north than previously expected and as yet it is not known if there are more mink in this area. If you have any information or sightings from this area in recent years, please contact Elaine.



Skye bridge, Kyle of Lochalsh. www.flickr.com



Jamie Urquhart, Biologist for the River Don Trust

The River Don Trust (RDT) is a charitable organisation established: To advance for public benefit environmental protection and improvement by conserving and enhancing the natural biodiversity associated with the freshwater environments of the River Don.

The RDT has developed a Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the catchment and has recently completed a draft Bio-security Plan for the catchment due to be completed in Jan 2011.

The Trust is currently monitoring and coordinating a number of rafts and volunteers across the catchment and has initiated mink control with several estates and landowners in the run up to a more comprehensive approach by the Mink project in 2011

The Trust biologist Jamie Urquhart the former project officer for the NE water vole conservation project has also uncovered several water vole colonies previously unrecorded in the upper Don catchment during his routine habitat surveys. Jamie has worked closely with these estates to ensure that mink control is ongoing in areas in close proximity to these water vole colonies.

The Trust is pleased to support the new RAFTS mink project and its officers and wish them all the success and are confident that they can already build on the excellent achievements made to date.



Dyce cemetery, www.riverdon.org.uk

Alastair Fenn- Deveron Bogie and Isla Rivers Trust

Alastair has continued to be on top form- with over 110 mink caught in the Deveron catchment since November 2009! This will have a considerable impact on the number of mink dispersing into neighbouring catchments of the Ugie and Spey.



and finally....

Thank you to all our volunteers for their hard work. Volunteers are urged to stock up on equipment they will need to get their rafts up and running for the crucial Spring monitoring and trapping.

Contact your Project Officer or there are stores of equipment to help yourself to at various locations. Please contact the store to ensure someone is available to assist you, before making the journey:

- * **Forvie Centre**, contact Annabel Drysdale or centre staff to check opening times on 01358 751330
- * **Dee Fisheries Trust**, contact Edwin Third or the main office on 01339 880411
- * **River Don Trust** office, Jamie Urquhart 01330 830080 or 07860 846 999
- * **Cairngorms National Park** (Grantown office) Helen Gray 07768 143739

We are always looking for new volunteers. Contact us!:

For North East (and NW enquiries): Sarah Atkinson 07899 060 569 s.a.atkinson@abdn.ac.uk

For Cairngorms (Spey & Tay): Helen Gray 07768 143739 helengray@cairngorms.co.uk

For Deveron, Bogie & Isla: Alastair Fenn 07850 328382 alastairfenn@deveron.org

For West Coast (Kyle of Lochalsh & north): Elaine Fraser 07801 953436 elaine.fraser@abdn.ac.uk



Thanks to our Partners and funding organisations

This project is being part-financed by the Scottish Government and European Community Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Rural Aberdeenshire and Rural Tayside Local Action Groups LEADER 2007-2013 Programme

