

National Water Vole Monitoring Programme 2015 Report

We are delighted by the response to the first year of our National Water Vole Monitoring Programme (NWWMP), with 188 sites surveyed and data submitted online. This was well over our initial target to survey 100 sites in the first year, so a big thank you to all of you, we really appreciate all your hard work.

Almost 150 sites were ones surveyed in the previous national surveys run by The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) and 44 were new sites registered with the programme by volunteers (Map 1). Of the 188 sites, 68 had water vole signs present on one or more transect (Map 2.). 35 of these positive sites were the initial national survey sites and 33 were new sites.

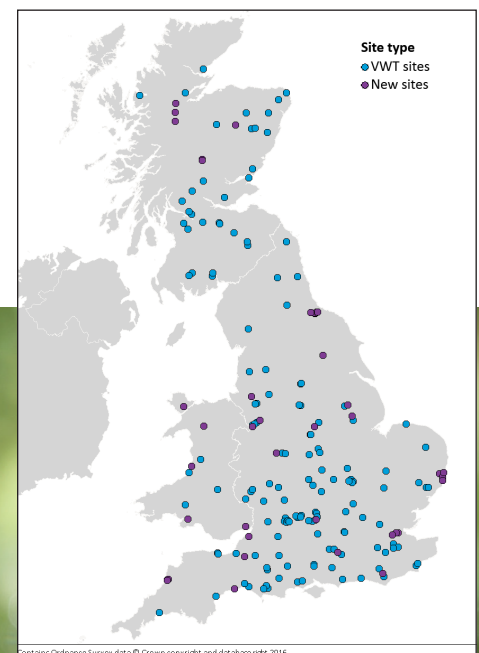
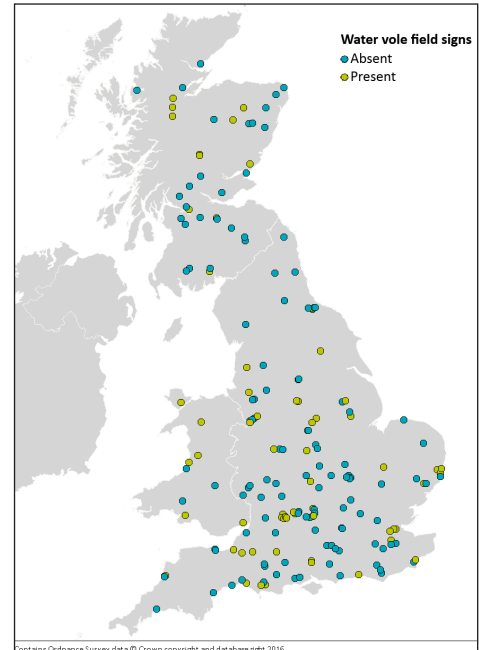
Water vole presence

Taking a closer look at the 144 sites previously surveyed by VWT, we can see how water vole presence has changed since the late 1980s. Almost all the sites, 123, had water voles present in 1989-90, 34 had water voles present in the 1996-98 survey and 35 had water voles present last year. However, this should be treated

with caution as the majority of the sites selected for this NWWMP were intentionally biased towards those sites that had had water voles present in the previous surveys. We will only be able to get reliable trend data once the programme has been running for a number of years and as the number of sites within the programme increases. Still, the findings from the initial year are encouraging in suggesting that the initial dramatic decline might have abated.

What can we learn from the different sites?

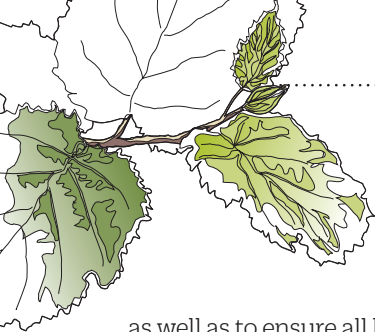
Water voles were present at a higher proportion of sites registered by volunteers rather than sites checked in previous national surveys: 65.9% compared with 22.9%. However, we expected this as many of these newly registered sites already have monitoring taking place as they are either National Key Sites, nature reserves, sites where reintroductions have occurred or sites that are known to have good water vole populations. In contrast the pre-selected sites were randomly chosen by VWT to give a good geographical spread across England, Scotland and Wales,



Map 1. All NWWMP sites surveyed in 2015 showing which sites are VWT sites and which are new sites registered with the programme.

Map 2. All NWWMP sites surveyed in 2015 showing whether water voles field signs were detected.





as well as to ensure all habitats were surveyed. We knew that many of them no longer had water voles present in the 1996-1998 survey and therefore the presence of water voles was always likely to be lower at these sites. However, many of these sites should have the potential to support water voles in the future, as mink are controlled and habitat conditions improve, and so the long term aim of the monitoring programme is to continue to survey them annually in the hope that water voles will recolonise them.

Different countries

England had the highest number of sites surveyed with a total of 142 sites, Scotland had 37 sites and 8 sites were surveyed in Wales.

Plans for 2016

We aim to increase the number of sites surveyed each year so we can collect robust data on year on year trends as they happen. To achieve this we would of course like everyone who surveyed a site last year to re-survey their site this year. And we would also like to increase the number of sites being surveyed and ensure that all regions have sites being monitored. If you'd be interested in surveying a second or third site please do have a look at the map of available sites when you log in at www.ptes.org/watervoles or, if you know someone who might be interested in getting involved, please ask them to visit the webpages to find out more. Also if you know of anyone else currently monitoring water voles elsewhere please ask them to register their site with the programme so their data can be included in our annual analysis.

We will once again be asking for surveys to take place during May if possible to try and standardise the data from all the sites. We will be sending out reminder emails from April onwards about when surveys can start.

Thank you so much again for helping us launch the first National Water Vole Monitoring Programme so successfully and we hope you continue to take part. ●



An otter print



Water vole feeding remains



A water vole latrine



Feeding remains



Thank you so much to all our volunteers who submitted photos. You can see some of the water vole signs discovered above, as well as how diverse the sites surveyed were. Please do continue to submit photos of your sites and any signs you find.

Photo credits from top left Neil Donkin, Nicholas Donkin, Thomas Ryan, Jenny Benford, Joanna Wawrzyczek, Becky Priestley, Nick Littlewood, Lorcan Adrain, Nick Littlewood