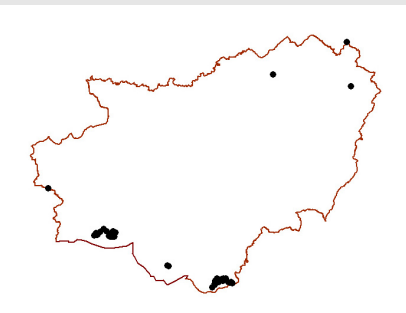


CARMARTHENSHIRE LOCAL BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

WATER VOLE/ *ARVICOLA TERRESTRIS*



Conservation objectives:

- Maintain the current distribution and abundance of water voles in county
- Encourage favourable management of watercourses to encourage use by water vole

What you can do to help:

- Report all signs of water vole to the county mammal recorder n.matthew@ccw.gov.uk
- If you manage habitat where water vole are known – seek advice on management for the species

Further information:

www.mammal.org.uk/watervol
www.carmarthenshire.gov.uk

The character 'Ratty' from the Wind in the Willows is in fact a water vole



Ecology

The water vole is a small semi-aquatic rodent, which uses a range of freshwater habitats including rivers, streams, ditches, canals, lakes and ponds. It prefers sites with deep water and fairly steep banks into which it can dig its network of burrows and luxuriant bankside vegetation on which it feeds. Once common, the water vole has suffered a catastrophic decline in recent times, chiefly through habitat degradation and predation by the introduced American mink.

It can be confused with the rat but the ears of the water vole are hardly visible, unlike those of the rat, which stand out. The shorter tail is furry whilst that of the rat is naked. The muzzle of the water vole is blunt, not pointed.

Distribution in Carmarthenshire

Its distribution is highly localised and water voles are now absent from a number of formerly occupied sites. However a strong population occurs at the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT) National Wetlands Centre at Penclacwydd, with water voles sighted regularly both within the wetland reserve and within the ditch network of the surrounding grazing marshes. The 'Llanelli levels' has been nominated as a 'Key Site' for water vole, one of 14 in England and Wales, where large and possibly sustainable water vole populations occur.

Evidence of water voles has also recently been found in ditches around the Laugharne–Pendine area. Elsewhere small, isolated populations may still exist in suitable habitat. Upland streams are a potential refuge and water voles have certainly been recorded in similar situations elsewhere.

Legal status

The water vole is listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 where its habitat is protected.

Why is it in decline?

- * Loss and fragmentation of habitats.
- * Disturbance of riparian habitats, e.g. such as dredging and clearance of bankside vegetation.
- * Predation by mink.
- * Pollution of watercourses and poisoning by rodenticides.

What is being done locally

- * Local survey work carried out by the Environment Agency.
- * Training given to interested volunteers on identification and ecology of species.
- * Conservation work and research for species being carried out at Penclacwydd.

Where you can find water vole

Good populations occur at the WWT at Penclacwydd. Listen for their distinctive "plop" when they dive into the water.