

## ADVISORY INFORMATION – WATER VOLE



An inhabitant of well-vegetated rivers, ditches and ponds, the water vole is one of the UK's most threatened mammals. Water voles and their burrows are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act.

### Key Points

- Water voles are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. It is an offence to kill or take a water vole, or to damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used for shelter or protection, or to disturb a water vole while it occupies such a place.
- Where water voles are present or become established within a quarry, seek advice.
- Water voles and their habitat should be left undisturbed. Water voles are active mainly within two metres of the water and buffer strips of marginal aquatic vegetation should be left.
- A stand-off zone of at least 3, preferably 6, metres from the waters' edge should be provided where people, vehicles and storage of materials are not permitted.
- Projects should be planned so that they do not sever suitable habitat or isolate existing colonies. The statutory conservation agencies must be consulted for all work affecting water vole habitats.

### Ecology

Water voles are one of the most threatened mammal species in the country, having declined from past relative abundance to a few scattered colonies, largely due to habitat loss, but also due to predation by introduced mink. Water voles are shy and rarely seen; though the characteristic 'plop' as they dive into the water may sometimes be heard. They are associated with rivers, canals, ditches and sometimes ponds and larger water bodies. Water voles depend upon the presence of earth banks, into which they can dig their holes, and abundant vegetation. Colonies may relocate from time to time and so apparently abandoned holes does not mean a permanently absent colony.

The Mammal Society works to protect, halt the decline of threatened species, and give advice on all issues affecting British mammals [www.mammal.org.uk](http://www.mammal.org.uk)