



Tool Box Talk

Focus on Performance

Water Voles

Sust. 22

What?

Water voles live in burrows in well-vegetated banks of slow moving streams and rivers. Although often mistaken for rats, water voles are cautious and mainly active during the day as opposed to the bolder mainly nocturnal rats. Water voles have chestnut brown fur, a round face and rounded ears (rats have pointed faces and less prominent ears), as well as a relatively short tail. They are excellent swimmers and are often sighted as they 'plop' into the water to escape from threats.



Why?

The water vole is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan species, considered as being in decline and extremely vulnerable (particularly to predation by non-native species such as the North American mink). The water vole is protected by legislation. This includes causing injury or death and damage or destruction of habitat. Prosecution can lead to fines of up to £5,000 and 6 months in prison. Work that requires the disturbance of water voles requires a licence.



How?

- If water voles are known to be within or adjacent to a work area, a licence for disturbance is required. Ensure you are familiar with all the requirements which may include exclusion zones, work on river banks or vegetation clearance under ecologist supervision.
- If you are unsure whether your work may affect water voles, seek expert ecological advice.
- Stop work immediately and report any water voles or discoveries of burrows after works have started.
- Only licensed workers are permitted to handle or move water voles. Never pick up and move a water vole unless you have been trained and it is under direction of a licensed water vole worker.

If the works are likely to disturb a water vole or habitat, a licence is needed from the relevant body:

- England: Natural England
- Scotland: Scottish Natural Heritage
- Wales: Countryside Council for Wales

Questions

1. How might you tell the difference between a water vole and a rat?
2. What is the maximum fine per offence for disturbing a water vole?
3. Where might you find a water vole or its burrow?

If you have any queries regarding the content of this tool box talk please contact your Sustainability Advisor or Line Manager.