



Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

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News Release

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Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust sets to bring water voles back from the brink thanks to support from Natural England's Species Recovery Programme

It is widely acknowledged that the water vole is the UK's fastest declining mammal. Surveys for the species in Nottinghamshire earlier this year found them to be almost entirely absent from sites where they were recorded historically. Surveys between 2020-2022 found water voles to be largely absent from sites where they were recorded as recently as 2013 and surveys dating back to 2014 showed a reduction in distribution from the year 2000.

This local evidence, plus continued pressure on water vole populations across the UK and their recent extinction in some counties, demonstrates that urgent action is required to prevent this charismatic and important mammal being lost from Nottinghamshire. Now, thanks to a grant of almost half a million pounds from Natural England's Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust, which helped coordinate the first county-wide survey for the species back in 1997/98, is to embark on an ambitious project to restore water vole populations across three key areas of the county.

The project, which will run until March 2025 will see £491,740 invested in a range of measures to restore and create vital wetland habitat to support the species, to boost water vole numbers and a targeted programme of mink control across 900 hectares of wetland habitat and more than 50km of rivers to give water vole populations the chance to recover.

The Nottinghamshire Water Vole Recovery Project is one of 63 projects aimed at recovering a wide range of our scarcest animals and plants, to be delivered across the UK with £13.5 million of funding via Natural England's Species Recovery Programme.

The project aims to secure a thriving future for water voles in Nottinghamshire by tackling the causes of decline through effective mink control, using lessons from successes in other projects, and through habitat creation and enhancement at a landscape-scale in at least three catchments across the county (Erewash, Sherwood and Idle). Using these measures, The project aims to restore water vole populations at the charity's flagship Idle Valley and Attenborough Nature Reserves amongst other wetland sites.

Speaking about the project, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust's Head of Nature Recovery (North) Janice Bradley MBE said: *"The evidence is stark and clear, without urgent action, the future for water voles in our county is bleak and we risk losing this much-loved species forever from Nottinghamshire. Given the historic regional importance of Nottinghamshire's water vole population and the fact that many key river catchments are shared with neighbouring counties – the continued decline of water voles in Notts will also impact on other counties. The support of Natural England's Species Recovery Capital Grant Scheme finally gives us the resources to match our long-held ambition and we're excited that we can now focus on bringing water voles back from the brink. We are also working with projects in our neighbouring counties to make sure that our boundaries join up, so between us we can tackle the causes of the loss of water voles at scale across 3 regions."*

With the support of key partners including Natural England, the Environment Agency, Nottingham Trent University, Internal Drainage Boards, Notts Biodiversity Action Group and Severn Trent, the Trust aims to:

- prevent further loss of water voles to mink predation in an initial 3 catchment areas in Nottinghamshire and on the Notts / Derbyshire border
- substantively increase the availability of suitable habitat for water voles in the floodplains of the target rivers
- reintroduce water voles where they have been lost and there is little chance of natural recolonisation by releasing captive bred water voles in an ark site at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve.

The Trust also expects the project to provide the foundations for a county-wide recovery programme in the years ahead.

Speaking on behalf of Natural England, Lead Species Reintroduction & Recovery Adviser Danielle Greaves said: *Our rare and endangered species are facing extreme pressures and*

it is important we work together to take action to prevent further declines. As a result, I am delighted that Natural England has awarded funding to this important project. Against the setting of the biodiversity & climate emergencies, this type of positive targeted action for the threatened Water Vole will make a tremendous positive impact within Nottinghamshire & the surrounding counties.

I am delighted to support this project along its journey and to witness the long-term positive affects it will have on Nottinghamshire's Water Vole population.

One of the most exciting aspects of the project is the creation of a water vole 'Ark' site at the charity's Idle Valley Nature Reserve near Retford – within the 58-hectare enclosure created to enable beavers to be reintroduced to the county in 2021. Gary Cragg – Nottinghamshire Water Vole Project Manager explained: *"By focussing on targeted mink control and large-scale habitat creation and improvement we can create the right conditions for the reintroduction of water voles to help rebuild our dwindling and fragmented population. Our beaver enclosure at the Idle Valley Nature Reserve provides a unique setting to establish an Ark site for water voles to enable us to bring these important and valuable mammals back to the Idle Valley Nature Reserve. In time, they will be able to disperse from the Ark site across the whole 375 hectares of the reserve and into the River Idle."*

The habitat creation and enhancement through the project which will include at least 40 new specially designed ponds close to watercourses; improvements to at least 10km of riverside habitats including steep earth banks in which water voles can burrow in existing suitable stretches of river, ditch and lake and new reedbeds with networks of deeper ditches suitable for water voles to feed and build nests. As well as reversing the plight of water voles, this programme will benefit other threatened species including bittern, sedge warbler, harvest mouse, otter, nathusius pipistrelle and common tern.

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PHOTO

Please find attached an image for single use in relation to this media release



Photo Caption: 'Team Water Vole' From left to right:
Water Vole Recovery Officers Jack Scarborough & Lydia Rackham; Head of Nature Recovery (North) Janice Bradley and Gary Cragg, Water Vole Recovery Project Manager.

For further information or to request interviews please contact Erin McDaid on 07734 573862 emcdaid@nottswt.co.uk or Rachel Rutherford on 07519 633236 rrutherford@nottswt.co.uk

Notes for Editors

1) The **Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust**, a registered charity, manages dozens of nature reserves throughout the county. It advises local authorities, community groups and landowners on nature conservation issues, and makes a major input into decision-making on planning matters and other issues.

2) The Trust is part of a nation-wide network of local Trusts which work to protect wildlife in town and country - The Wildlife Trusts. The Wildlife Trusts now boast over 900,000 members. For more information, please see our website: www.nottinghamshirewildlife.org

3) **Natural England** – further details about the Species Recovery Programme Capital Grant Scheme awards can be found [here](#)