American Mink, *Neovison vison*

**Overview**

Short description of *Neovison vison*, American Mink

The American mink is a semi-aquatic mustelid with rich, usually dark brown fur. There is often a white patch on the chin but this species generally lacks the white upper lip shown by the European mink *M. lutreola*. It is a generalist and opportunistic predator with a variable diet that includes aquatic, semi-aquatic and terrestrial prey.

Description of *Neovison vison*, American Mink status in GB

The American mink is almost ubiquitous in GB but, except for parts of northern Scotland, Arran, the Outer Hebrides and most offshore islands. The GB population size was estimated at 36,950 in 2004.

**Habitat summary: Neovison vison, American Mink**

Mink occupy both freshwater and saltwater habitats. Mink habitually follow waterways, lake edges and coasts, but cross other habitats regularly. They can often spend time feeding away from water, where conditions allow.

**Overview table**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment:</th>
<th>Terrestrial</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Species status:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Functional type:</td>
<td>Predator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status in England:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<td>Status in Scotland:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Status in Wales:</td>
<td>Non-Native</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location of first record:</td>
<td>Singleton, near Blackpool</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date of first record:</td>
<td>1948</td>
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**Invasion history: Neovison vison, American Mink**

**Origin**

The native range is in North America, from southern states of the USA to the edge of the Arctic Circle in Canada and Alaska.

**First Record**

The first GB imports of American mink to fur farms were in 1929. Escapes were soon being reported and the first record from the wild was 1948 but the first breeding in the wild was not confirmed until 1956.

**Pathway and Method**
The number of mink farms in GB rose to a peak of around 700 in 1962. From 1929 and into the 1950s, large shipments of mink were being imported from North America and Scandinavia. The last GB mink farm closed in 2003. During this long period, many escapes took place from captivity and many animals were also deliberately released. The population spread rapidly, especially along rivers, in places reaching offshore islands.

Species Status
Mink are now widespread in GB. An eradication attempt is nearing completion in the Outer Hebrides. Mink numbers may have decreased in some areas, especially in England, with a resurgence of otter populations. American mink are widespread from Iceland, north Norway and Russia south to Spain and Italy. Other non-native populations occur in Patagonia and possibly in Japan and other Asian countries. It is widely regarded as seriously invasive.

Ecology & Habitat: Neovison vison, American Mink

Dispersal Mechanisms
Males usually disperse further than females and can disperse up to 50 km from their natal home range, typically along water bodies.

Reproduction
Males (average 1.2 kg) are much heavier than females (0.7 kg). There is intra-sexual territoriality with inter-sexual overlap. In the temperate zone mating takes place between late February and early April. Implantation is delayed and gestation lasts about 39 days. On average 5-8 young per litter are born between April and May. They start dispersing in August and reach sexual maturity at 10 months. Life expectancy is 3–4 years in the wild.

Known Predators/Herbivores
Mink may occasionally be taken by raptors and by larger mammalian predators.

Resistant Stages
None.

Habitat Occupied in GB
American mink hunt mostly in water and are most frequently seen in rivers or lakes, or at the coast. They also occur in a wide range of wooded or scrubby habitats, not necessarily near water.

Distribution: Neovison vison, American Mink
American mink have been introduced widely in Europe, in southern and eastern Russia and in South America (Argentina and Chile) and possibly also in Japan and other Asian countries. Numbers are increasing worldwide but apparently decreasing in some European countries (e.g. GB, Sweden).

Impacts: Neovison vison, American Mink

Environmental Impact
Impact on native species can occur through predation, competition, and potentially also by acting as a vector of disease. Significant population declines of ground-nesting birds (e.g. Larus ridibundus, Sterna hirundo) and small mammals (e.g. water vole Arvicola amphibius) have resulted from mink predation in its introduced range. The European mink (Mustela lutreola), whose range is now restricted to a few fragmented populations in continental Europe, is threatened with extinction by the American mink through competition by means of direct aggression. Little is known about mink as a vector of disease but Aleutian disease has been found in a feral population and could be transmissible to native mustelids.

Health and Social Impact
None.

Economic Impact
Can inflict damage to free-ranging chickens, reared game birds, fisheries (salmon farming) and the ecotourism industry through predation on ground-nesting birds.

References & Links: Neovison vison, American Mink

Identification
Biology, ecology, spread, vectors


Management and impact


and mink predation in determining the status and distribution of declining populations of water voles in England. Animal Conservation, 1, 129–137.


General
