



National framework for action towards the eradication of American mink in England

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Introduction

This framework acts as an overarching strategic document. It sets out a shared vision and principles for the **complete eradication of American mink from England**. The expectation is that it supports the creation of a national partnership for mink eradication and the consequent development of a national reporting mechanism to track progress of individual projects across the country to achieve the goal of eradicating mink from England. By providing a common reference point for government bodies, NGOs, landowners, volunteers, and communities, the framework will enable alignment of efforts, resource sharing, and coordinated action. Its success depends not only on strong partnerships within England but also on close collaboration with Wales and Scotland.

Detailed operational guidance will be developed to accompany this framework, providing practical instructions on verification timelines, monitoring protocols, and implementation standards.

American mink (*Neogale vison*) were introduced to Great Britain (GB) for fur farming in the late 1920s and have, since they were first found breeding in the wild in 1956, rapidly established, causing severe impacts to native wildlife and becoming one of the most damaging invasive non-native mammals in GB. Predation by American mink has made water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) the fastest declining mammal in GB. Mink also heavily predate ground-nesting birds, particularly in seabird colonies and can damage farmed fish, poultry and reared game birds.

In recent decades improvements in mink control practices have emerged, starting with The Game & Wildlife Conservancy Trust mink rafts in the 1990s. Management efforts tended to focus on controlling mink in specific areas, primarily to protect water vole populations or breeding birds as national eradication was deemed unfeasible. This has resulted in many long-running local control projects with valuable experience and success, however most of these have been vulnerable to funding cuts or other issues which have meant that work has stopped or reduced, leading to re-invasion by mink.

The Waterlife Recovery Trust (WRT), a charity set up in 2022 helped mark a shift in approach. WRT undertook a trial eradication programme between 2021 and 2024 in East Anglia to determine if the eradication of mink, their complete removal, was feasible on a landscape scale and to end the cycle of control and re-invasion seen elsewhere. It was based on a model of regional coordination, volunteer support, smart technology and the use of scent lures. It proved highly successful within a period of a few years. Since then, WRT with its partner organisations has led and coordinated a rapid expansion of this operation, now covering 35% of England.

The success of this approach in eradicating mink to facilitate the local recovery of water voles has sparked a significant shift in the national conversation around the feasibility of mink eradication in GB.

Vision and Ambition

Vision

This framework's vision is an England free of American mink by 2035 enabling the recovery of native species and ecosystems.

Strategic Ambition

To coordinate support for the humane and evidence-based eradication of American mink in England by enabling a broad coalition of partners to contribute in complementary ways.

Objectives

This framework supports the national goal of mink eradication through these key objectives:

- **Build a national partnership** of aligned and committed organisations.
- **Enable coordinated action** by sharing data, knowledge, guidance, working practices and protocols.
- **Expand programme coverage** by supporting the launch and growth of regional or county-wide projects with strong governance.
- **Align funding** by reviewing and coordinating available resources (financial, volunteer, knowledge or other resources).
- **Monitor progress, adapt and improve** based on evidence and emerging needs.
- **Consolidate success** by maintaining a rolling front or, if progress stalls in any direction, establishing cordon sanitaires to prevent reinvasion.

For the purposes of this framework, we regard functional eradication to be the absence of a breeding population of American mink, with no evidence of their presence other than that of an occasional individual that has dispersed from outside the cleared zone. With no reproduction, the population in a cleared zone will inevitably become extinct and true eradication will have been achieved.

Current situation and next steps

American mink are believed to be eradicated from most of East Anglia, and coordinated trapping is in place across ten contiguous counties. Seven other counties across the East and Southeast of England are expected to be comprehensively trapped, with eradication underway, by the end of 2025. Less comprehensive trapping effort is ongoing in a further 25 English counties (as well in Wales and Scotland).

Eradication Progress Stages

Project areas can each be assigned a current eradication status, but that status is not static; it can change from year to year and should be reviewed regularly:

1. **Mink control only:** Low density of traps and mink populations largely unmanaged within the county.
2. **Emerging eradication effort:** Local projects with potential to scale into landscape scale eradication; trap coverage not yet comprehensive but with a stated aim to eradicate from a defined project area.
3. **Comprehensive trap coverage:** Landscape scale eradication underway with rapid mink population decline.
4. **Effectively mink-free:** Areas where mink have not been trapped, seen or recorded in other ways in 12 months or more (perhaps with an occasional immigrant, but no breeding).

There are fundamentally two ways to roll out mink eradication across England, each with advantages. Both could be, and are being, implemented simultaneously:

- **Expansion of existing landscape scale eradication operations:** Expand outward from the comprehensively trapped counties in the East of England, specifically across the Southeast, Southwest, Midlands and Yorkshire. If substantial funding was available, this would arguably provide the largest mink-free territorial gains for a fixed amount of funding by virtue of minimising the length of the active front and, at the same time, protecting gains already made.
- **Projects not contiguous with existing eradication effort:** Support and enable trapping in areas where local motivation, funding or partnerships already exist, often based on long-standing water vole or wildlife conservation work. These projects can evolve into landscape scale eradication efforts with clear governance, planning and broad community involvement. These efforts will eventually link up with other regional programmes, but they can begin in isolation and will likely expand as news and interest spreads. This approach encourages the highest level of participation but gains will be transient unless effort is sustained.

The key is that all projects, regardless of size, join the coordinated England-wide campaign to be efficient, effective, evidence-led and to maintain the highest standards of personal safety and animal welfare.

Some of these initiatives are already offering valuable lessons for operating in diverse environments especially mountainous, coastal, remote and urban.

The way that eradication projects are rolling out across England is a combination of both approaches, which is likely to continue. National partners and funders need to have a good awareness of both approaches for the continued development of mink eradication efforts across England, and can review their own projects, partnerships and strategies or other areas of work to align with this and support local partnerships.

Operational principles

The following principles should apply to all projects. These are important principles to an eradication project and are included here to act as a checklist to ensure consistency of approach:

Partnership and Collaboration

- **Collaboration and coordination:** County-wide or regional projects based on good coordination and strong governance, using shared standards and working practices.
- **Local action:** Wherever possible, engage local volunteers and landowners to manage and maintain traps, building community ownership and resilience.
- **Cross border cooperation:** Lasting eradication cannot be achieved by England alone. Close alignment with programmes in Wales and Scotland is vital to prevent reinvasion.

Evidence and Adaptation

- **Adaptive, evidence-based strategies:** Trapping strategies that are agile and responsive to emerging evidence.
- **Monitoring and adaptive management:** Maintain a network of traps, ensure projects are closely monitored so that problems, gaps or inconsistencies are rapidly identified and can be resolved.

Comprehensive and Humane Delivery

- **Comprehensive coverage:** Traps must cover the entire area being targeted. There must be no mink 'sanctuaries'.
- **Year-round trapping:** Mink can be trapped legally throughout the year. Year-round trapping is likely to achieve eradication effectively and efficiently.
- **Use targeted and humane eradication techniques:** Any impact on non-target species must be kept to the absolute minimum. Employ smart monitoring systems, scent lures (anal gland) and humane trapping methods.
- **Maintenance of high welfare standards across all partners will be required:** All trapping must meet legal welfare requirements for wildlife management¹, with training for all personnel.

¹ Animal Welfare Act 2006; Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996; Natural England, 2019, Wildlife management advice notice: The Animal Welfare Act 2006 (WML-GU02)

Verification that a project area is mink free

It will be important to provide a consistent, evidence-based approach for declaring and sustaining mink-free areas and to give partners, funders and the public confidence in status claims.

An area may be declared mink-free after a sustained, documented period of monitoring with no evidence of breeding. Verification timelines vary internationally and precise durations will be defined in accompanying operational guidance.

The framework's strategic aim is to achieve eradication following full trap coverage in a project area, supported by a multi-year post-declaration monitoring phase. Monitoring duration and intensity will be scaled to local risk factors, including proximity to unmanaged source populations, catch history, habitat connectivity and prior evidence of breeding. Specific monitoring durations and operational measures will be set out in accompanying operational guidance.

Mink-free Verification Levels

These levels apply after eradication efforts have reached full coverage and monitoring is in place. They provide an evidence-based assessment of mink-free status, whereas the current situation categories above describe operational progress toward eradication.

- **Verified mink-free (High confidence)** — No confirmed detections for the agreed verification period; continuous, documented monitoring; proportionate independent review/audit for high-risk or large areas.
- **Provisionally mink-free (Moderate confidence)** — No detections for minimum period but monitoring gaps or proximity to viable source populations remain.
- **Not mink-free (Low confidence)** — Recent detections or insufficient monitoring coverage.

Verification outcomes and the date of last assessment will be published on the national dashboard, maintained by the national partnership.

Indicators of Success

Indicators of success will include primary monitoring evidence of mink absence, ecological recovery of key species (for example water vole site occupancy), and programme delivery metrics; ecological signs will support but not substitute for formal verification, and standard metrics will be published on the national dashboard. Further information will be provided in operational guidance.

Integrating mink eradication and water vole conservation

Most mink control efforts in England have been initiated and funded as conservation measures to protect water voles (*Arvicola amphibius*).

The move from localised control to county or region-wide eradication requires a shift in prioritisation and funding, which can help support mink eradication nationally or regionally.

The following principles are intended to guide local decision-making, recognising local variation and choices. These are supported by the UK Water Vole Steering Group and align with the upcoming guidance on water vole re-introduction and translocations (Water Vole Releases and Conservation Translocations in Britain - Good Practice Guidance).

These are listed in order of priority:

1. Prioritise mink eradication

Mink predation is by far the most significant factor driving water vole decline and local extinction. Habitat restoration work on its own is unlikely to achieve water vole recovery while mink remain in an area. Eradication is a time-limited effort, with evidence that it can be achieved in some landscapes such as East Anglia within five years once full trap coverage is in place. Conservation activity should therefore prioritise enabling, setting up and supporting eradication partnerships to deliver county- or region-wide mink removal.

2. Support water vole recovery post-eradication

Once mink are removed, water voles often recolonise naturally within a few years. This natural recovery supports stronger, locally adapted populations. At this stage, habitat improvements, such as restoring connectivity and marginal habitats, can help secure long-term resilience.

3. Consider water vole re-introduction

Reintroductions should only be considered where:

- Mink have already been eradicated;
- There is enough suitable habitat to support a viable population long term;
- Natural recolonisation is unlikely.

Reintroduction efforts are far more likely to succeed once effective, sustained mink removal is achievable, in line with the Defra guidance on [‘Reintroductions and other conservation translocations: code and guidance for England’](#). This approach offers the greatest benefit to the long-term, sustainable recovery of water vole populations.

Funding

There is currently no single, central fund dedicated to a national programme for American mink eradication in England. Instead, projects rely on a mix of funding streams.

Government bodies are working to re-purpose and prioritise existing funding streams and resources, while also reducing administrative barriers, such as consenting and permitting, that can slow progress. While mink control is generally framed as invasive species management, it is closely linked to species recovery objectives, particularly water vole conservation. For larger-scale initiatives, proposals should highlight both aspects to maximise eligibility across different funding routes.

In practice, most projects use a blended approach, combining public grants, agri-environment payments, charitable contributions, and support from private or local partners. Opportunities typically include government programmes for species recovery, environmental land management schemes, catchment-based funding from environmental agencies, and contributions from local authorities, drainage boards, and water companies. Larger projects may also draw on heritage or community-focused grants, landfill community funds, and charitable trusts. Many delivery organisations supplement these sources with donor income and volunteer networks.

While central government funding exists, it is limited and usually supports coordination rather than large-scale delivery, making partnership funding essential.

Partnership

This framework’s vision can only be achieved through good collaboration and partnership and invites a broad set of partners to align with the national ambition with the following roles:

Partnership	Role
Government Bodies	Strategic alignment, streamlined regulation, funding, convening, access
Local Authorities and Catchment Partnerships	Access, integration with local nature recovery strategies
Water Companies	Access, trap hosting, funding, coordination
NGOs and Conservation Charities	Lead role, coordination, community engagement
Academic and Research Institutions	Monitoring, impact assessment, independent audit

Partnership	Role
Landowners	Access, trap hosting and management, habitat stewardship
Volunteers	Local delivery, trap maintenance, community outreach
Data and Information Providers	National and local data custodians, support partnerships

Implementation and review

Actions will be identified by the partnership, and progress tracked through regular group communication and 6-monthly meetings. Progress will ideally be reported annually through a public report and a national dashboard, showing eradication status by county.

Next steps

- Framework finalised and adopted: Winter 2025
- First partnership meeting: Early 2026
- Action and implementation plan developed: Spring 2026

Conclusion

With strong partnerships, a diligent approach and use of smart technology and up to date evidence, eradication of American mink on a large scale is feasible and achievable.

This framework is a collective call to action to all interested parties to join in this shared goal and help expand the ground-breaking work already completed. The framework will continue to evolve, informed by emerging evidence, experience and our collaborative work towards a mink free England.