

# Tails of the Uplands Survey

## Community Science



This guide provides information about our water vole, mink and otter monitoring. Learning how to identify tracks and signs of these mammals is essential if you'd like to become a survey volunteer. Information about how to participate can be found on our website:

[www.moorsforthefuture.org/community-science](http://www.moorsforthefuture.org/community-science)

### Moors for the Future

The uplands of the South Pennines are specially protected for their internationally important blanket bog habitat.

Healthy blanket bogs are inherently wet and are made up of peat soils which can actively store carbon.

They are not only important for wildlife, but supply us with cleaner drinking water, help reduce wildfire and flood risks, provide us with green spaces to explore, and are likely to be more resilient to climate change.

Our volunteers are monitoring the impact of climate change on the uplands, and are helping us to spread the word about the importance of the South Pennine moors.

**Water voles** were once widespread along UK waterways, but are now our fastest declining mammal.

Habitat loss has left scarce populations which are isolated and vulnerable to predators including American mink. The uplands may be an important remaining stronghold for this charismatic rodent.

Climate change could pose new threats to water voles as hotter, drier summers and more extreme rainfall events may affect their food, cover and burrows. Surveying how many there are and where they're found is increasingly important to track their survival.

**American mink** were introduced to the UK and spread rapidly, taking advantage of gaps left by the absence of otters.

Mink are a major predator of water voles and can eradicate them from an area. It is thought that mink numbers may decline where otters are present.

Monitoring will help to provide an early warning of mink populations expanding into the uplands.

**Eurasian otters** are one of the UK's top predators and an important indicator of the health of our rivers and wetlands.

Otters were lost from much of the UK in the 1950s and 60s due to persecution and the use of organochlorine pesticides, but have made an impressive recovery over the last twenty years.

Monitoring tracks and signs of otters will allow us to see how their distribution is changing in and around our upland, and how they interact with mink and water vole populations.

## Water vole *Arvicola amphibious*



A small rodent with a blunt nose, short rounded ears, small black eyes and a short, slightly furry tail.

**Size:** head and body length: 14-22 cm; tail length: 9.5-14 cm.

**Colour:** glossy dark chestnut brown to black.

**Tracks:** five toes show on the hind foot and four on the fore foot, which leave a 2-2.5 cm star-shaped pattern. Easily confused with rat footprints.

**Signs:** latrines (piles of cylindrical, blunt-ended droppings); feeding signs (small piles of vegetation neatly cut off at 45°); and oval-shaped burrows (4-8 cm wide around the water line).

**Status:** protected by law in the UK.



## American mink *Neovison vison*



A semi-aquatic mustelid with a slender body, relatively short legs, pointed nose and slightly bushy tail.

**Size:** head and body length: 30-43 cm; tail length: 13-23 cm. Males tend to be larger than females.

**Colour:** dark brown to black fur with white patches on the chin, throat and sometimes chest.

**Tracks:** 2.5-4 cm wide with five pointed toes, although only four may be visible, and a crescent-shaped pad.

**Signs:** scat (twisted, foul-smelling droppings).

**Status:** American mink is an introduced, non-native species which is controlled in the UK to reduce its impact on native wildlife.



## Eurasian otter *Lutra lutra*



An elusive mustelid with a long, slender body, long thick tail, and a broad head with small ears and prominent whiskers.

**Size:** head and body length: 57-70 cm; tail length: 35-40 cm.

**Colour:** brown, often with a pale underside.

**Tracks:** 6-7 cm wide with five rounded, teardrop-shaped toes with claws and webbing sometimes visible.

**Signs:** spraint (dark, sweet or musty smelling droppings, usually on a hard surface).

**Status:** protected by national and international law.



Moors for the Future Partnership's Community Science Project is an important initiative to collect long-term data to help understand how moorlands and the species they support are responding to climate change. For more information about this survey and others visit [www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/community-science](http://www.moorsforthefuture.org.uk/community-science)

 [www.facebook.com/MoorCitizens](https://www.facebook.com/MoorCitizens)

 [@MoorCitizens](https://twitter.com/MoorCitizens)

 [moorcitizens@peakdistrict.gov.uk](mailto:moorcitizens@peakdistrict.gov.uk)

 01629 816585



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