

# Water Vole

*Arvicola amphibius*

Mammal · Here all year · does not hibernate



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A chunky, chestnut-brown to almost black rodent with a blunt rounded nose, small ears buried in fur and a furry tail — quite unlike the pointed-faced, bare-tailed brown rat it is so often mistaken for. Water voles live in steep-banked burns, ditches and slow rivers with thick bankside vegetation. They have vanished from most of their former British range and any local population is significant.

## BEHAVIOUR

Water voles burrow into soft banks with entrances at and below the waterline, and graze a lawn-like patch of vegetation nearby, leaving neat 45-degree cut stems and cigar-shaped droppings at latrine sites. The characteristic sound is the 'plop' as one drops into the water. Their collapse is driven mainly by predation by American mink, an escaped fur-farm species against which the vole has no defence, compounded by loss of soft, well-vegetated banks.

## WHEN TO SEE IT

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## QUICK FACTS

|           |                                                          |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| FAMILY    | Voles, lemmings and hamsters (Cricetidae)                |
| SIZE      | Body 14-22 cm plus a 9.5-14 cm tail                      |
| UK STATUS | Fully protected; Britain's fastest-declining wild mammal |

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