**RSPB Dearne Valley Water Vole Report 2020**

**Water Voles at Old Moor and Wombwell Ings**

Water voles are actively monitored across the RSPB reserves in the Dearne Valley and are also recorded whilst we are surveying for mink with footprint rafts and trail cameras. Water vole surveys have been carried out on both Old Moor & Wombwell Ings this year, using the same methodology as outlined in the previous Water Vole Report (2019) which has been used since 2009. This methodology uses floating rafts strategically placed across the site, baited with apple, and monitored regularly to check for signs of feeding, droppings or nearby latrines.

Ditches have also been monitored to look for indicative signs of water vole usage, checking for burrows, runs, latrine and feeding sites. Both walkover surveys and raft monitoring have taken place on both Old Moor and Wombwell Ings. In addition to these, a clay raft has also been placed on Green Lane ditch at Old Moor to look for footprints, and remote cameras have been put onto any rafts where the apple has been taken or partly eaten. There have been no incidental records of Water Vole this year. Incidental records are any water vole, or water vole sign recorded outside of the specific monitoring period or area. These include Wardens carrying out daily reserve work, staff or volunteers carrying out other wildlife surveys where ditches are being monitored (e.g. Dragonfly surveys), or records from members of the public using the reserve.

**Raft Locations**



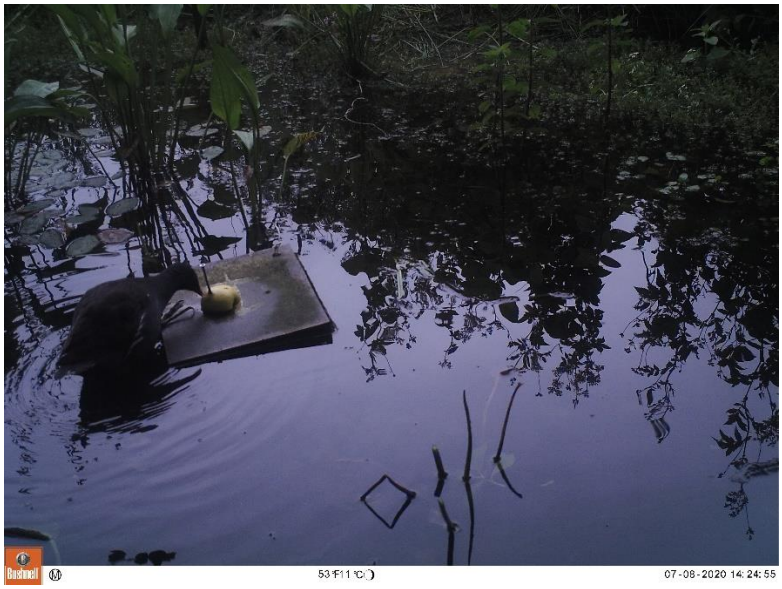
Water Vole Raft Location Wombwell 2020




## Results

| **Wombwell Ings** | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 02/07/2020 | | | | **Results Key** | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | 0 | Apple not touched |
| 7 | 0 | N | | 1 | Apple partially touched |
| 10 | 0 | N | | 2 | Apple gone |
| 12 | 1 | N | Slug eating apple | 3 | Some latrine evidence |
| | | | | 4 | Good latrine evidence |
| 17/07/2020 | | | | 5 | Evidence of feeding |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | 6 | Evidence of other mammals |
| 7 | 0 | N | | 7 | Site disturbed |
| 10 | 0 | N | | | |
| 12 | 0 | N | | | |
| | | | | | |
| 31/07/2020 | | | | | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | |
| 7 | 0 | N | | | |
| 10 | 0 | N | | | |
| 12 | 0 | N | | | |
| | | | | | |
| 10/08/2020 | | | | | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | |
| 7 | - | N | River water level too high to access raft | | |
| 10 | 0 | N | | | |
| 12 | 0 | N | | | |

| **Old Moor** | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 30/06/2020 | | | | | | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | | |
| 1 | - | N | | | **Results Key** | |
| 2 | - | N | | | 0 | Apple not touched |
| 4 | 2+3 | N | Poo on raft but not consistant with WV latrine, apple pecked at | | 1 | Apple partially touched |
| 5 | 0 | N | | | 2 | Apple gone |
| 6 | 0 | N | | | 3 | Some latrine evidence |
| 8 | 1 | N | Apple pecked at top | | 4 | Good latrine evidence |
| Clay | 0 | N | | | 5 | Evidence of feeding |
| | | | | | 6 | Evidence of other mammals |
| 02/07/2020 | | | | | 7 | Site disturbed |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | | |
| 1 | 2 | N | | | | |
| 2 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 4 | 1 | N | Peck marks on apple | | | |
| 5 | 2 | N | | | | |
| 6 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 8 | 0 | N | | | | |
| Clay | 0 | N | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| 07/07/2020 | | | | | | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | | |
| 1 | 2 | Y | Moorhen on camera eating apple | | | |
| 2 | 2 | N | | | | |
| 4 | 1 | N | | | | |
| 5 | 2 | N | | | | |
| 6 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 8 | 1 | N | | | | |
| Clay | 0 | N | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| 16/07/2020 | | | | | | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | | |
| 1 | 1 | N | Moorhen on ditch | | | |
| 2 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 4 | 1 | N | peck marks in apple | | | |
| 5 | 1 | N | peck marks in apple | | | |
| 6 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 8 | 0 | N | | | | |
| Clay | 0 | N | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| 05/08/2020 | | | | | | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | | |
| 1 | 1 | N | peck marks in apple | | | |
| 2 | 1 | N | peck marks in apple | | | |
| 4 | 2 | N | | | | |
| 5 | 2 | Y | Moorhen nr raft | | | |
| 6 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 8 | 0 | N | | | | |
| Clay | - | N | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | |
| 06/08/2020 | | | | | | |
| Raft No. | Result | Camera? | Comments | | | |
| 1 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 2 | 1 | N | peck marks in apple | | | |
| 4 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 5 | 1 | N | Rat & Moorhen on camera eating the apple | | | |
| 6 | 0 | N | | | | |
| 8 | 0 | N | | | | |
| Clay | - | N | | | | |


07-08-2020 14:24:55


Bushnell
08-06-2020 00:41:09


Bushnell
08-05-2020 16:49:38

Walkover survey results – walkover surveys were carried out at both Wombwell Ings and Old Moor, outside of the main breeding season to avoid disturbance to breeding birds. No evidence of water vole was found on any of the ditches surveyed. Walkover survey sheets are attached.

**Summary**

Signs of water voles are steadily decreasing in all areas of the reserve network, this coupled with an increase in mink numbers (now being controlled at Old Moor) and the increasing density of ditch vegetation creating a predator shadow paint a bleak picture.

Disappointingly no evidence was found for water vole using any of the areas surveyed. However, the surveys were carried out mostly in areas likely to be affected by the National Lottery Heritage Fund project, and I would expect these areas not to be prime water vole habitat due to them being heavily vegetated and have high levels of disturbance. Most of the ditches surveyed on Old Moor have had little to no management in the last 5-10 years due to accessibility and situated close to footpaths. Wombwell Ings also has heavily vegetated ditches and a high level of disturbance by people walking across the wet grassland and allowing dogs to jump into pools and ditches. The invasive non-native species Crassula helmsii is present in all of these locations (with the exception of the River Dove where the water is too fast paced), and in some cases such as Green Lane ditch, the crassula has become extremely dominant providing no real open water for the water vole to use. Varying water levels and the speed of the water in the River Dove make it very unlikely to be suitable for water vole.

No surveying was carried out on the reedbeds at Old Moor which is likely to be the most suitable habitat for water vole, as during the pandemic we were limited in staff time so concentrated the surveying on areas affected by NLHF. However, we know from past surveys that the water vole population is likely to have been hit heavily by mink predation on site prior to their control by the site team.

The results of the surveys indicate no presence of water vole in any of the areas affected by the NLHF project, however, water vole surveys will continue to be carried throughout the project by the site team.