

Workshop – Mink eradication or control?

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Session 1

Should we be aiming for mink eradication rather than mink control?

- Some don't believe that eradication can happen – some places in Scotland are considering stopping mink control because it is a wasted effort.
- But it depends on the region. It could be possible in Wales, but it is much harder to know where to start in land-locked regions.
- What we need is NATIONAL COLLABORATION, a pass on of knowledge, a joined up project across the whole country. Otherwise it is just a waste of time. Need continuity and consistency.

How?

- Get as many people involved as possible and prioritise certain people that have long-term and business reasons for mink eradication. And prioritise rafts that have activity.
- We need to know our enemy better. A better understanding of mink biology and use this to focus on the right areas.
- Example: A story was told of a big male mink that was dominating and defending the best bit of a brook, after he was killed lots of mink flooded that area. If we find out the best patches for mink we can have a better impact on eradication.
- We need to go hard or go home. We need the right volunteers for the right jobs and the right technology.
- Better trapping technology 'mink police' that just trap mink. Gas traps? That also eliminate bycatch. We need to speak to the right people but it does seem almost impossible to eliminate bycatch from traps like these.

We want eradication but this is expensive, are there any other answers?

- Licence scheme?
- EDLA for mink, payment for having no mink rather than trapping mink?
- Neutering is not an option, need to just be killed, because it is actually illegal to release them again.
- Flushing is also not an option as this is a very emotive topic and causes disquiet in the public.
- Pole cats and otters are not a consistent solution, like it was at Kielder.
- We need guaranteed investment from landowners who agree to shoot mink.

Is this possible to achieve on the mainland?

How can we achieve mink control over a large area?

- Yes, if we work together as a nation. This is the main benefit of partnerships.
- Large collaboration is needed, sharing of info and a national database that everybody can see and to work with people outside of your immediate area who may just need a little bit of advice.
- Communication is essential. The Environment Agency have a large amount of contacts and should lead on this (if they still have adequate funding).
- Leadership is also essential – Scotland has a big charismatic character leading the project.

How do we interact with the public?

- It can be hard to share mink control with the wider community, we don't often promote everything we are doing to the press. But usually, we are more surprised how much understanding there is in the public.
- Disguising mink trapping as 'mammal monitoring' can make it easier for the public to digest.
- What about a negative mink campaign – with big teeth?

Mink control should be a standard thing across all wetland reserves and there needs to be a policy in the Wildlife Trusts. But there is just too much inconsistency – even within organisations.

What funding should be involved?

- There is a need to bring people that work with wildlife and developers together.
- There is really nothing for sustainable long term projects. It is hard to hold onto project officers, who are some of the people who provide consistency, because they are so badly paid.

Session 2

Should we be aiming for mink eradication rather than mink control?

- YES!
- Need to start with Mink records.
- Once trapping begins, population numbers decrease as older individuals do not breed

Mink control – how?

- Are there local protocols available for mink control? If so this must be shared with everyone involved.
- Use mink rafts; mink are easy to trap – run the traps for 5 days.
- Yorkshire Wildlife Trust did eradicate mink, but now there is no appetite to trap mink from local landowners as the momentum has been lost.
- Mink do return!

The practicalities

- Use volunteers to be trap checkers
- Who dispatches? YWT didn't ask volunteers to dispatch mink for insurance purposes. Fire arms are dangerous!
- Mink are not easy to shoot, they have a very hard skull; need to shoot in the back of the head – need to keep them still by confining the animal into the end of the trap using a comb-like device.
- Don't bait traps
- Licenses are not required to buy an air rifle
- Don't dispatch mink in urban settings, move the trap and the mammal and dispatch elsewhere.

How can we achieve mink control over a large area?

- Get the local councils involved
- Do we have the capacity within NGOs to achieve eradication?
- We need regional support from landowners, rivers keepers, gun licensers
- When culling mink is underway; participants will need to sign an agreement and agree to use live capture traps.

Issues: Ensuring landowners are not killing non-target species

How do we interact with the public?

- Be honest
- Don't skirt around the subject, mink trapping is a necessity not undertaken for enjoyment. FC kill deer and manage to do so without bad PR
- Don't kill mink during the breeding season

