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SCOTTISH NATURAL HERITAGE



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NEWS RELEASE

19 May 2003

POSITIVE OUTLOOK FOR MINK ERADICATION SCHEME

New estimates for the number of mink likely to be present in the Western Isles reveal that the problem is not as bad as was previously thought.

Hebridean Mink Project Manager Dr Sugoto Roy has estimated there could be as little as 500 mink present in the area where eradication is currently taking place - South Harris, North Uist, Benbecula and South Uist. This figure is based on information from the trapping effort with 232 mink having been caught since the project began in November 2001.

The second estimated figure is the carrying capacity, or simply the number of mink that the whole of the Western Isles could potentially hold. By comparing the densities of mink found in different habitat types, and working out the total areas covered by these habitat types, an estimated figure of 4,000 mink is shown. This is a more accurate estimate compared to that by Hudson and Cox in 1989 of 15,000.

The project is now well into its second year and Dr Roy has studied the data collected by the project to date to come up with the new figures. He said: "These new figures give a welcome boost to all those involved in the Hebridean Mink Project and bodes well for the future, and the species complete eradication from the Western Isles."

"These figures are only estimates but they are as accurate as anyone could be at this stage of the scheme, and certainly more accurate than previous figures. This information will be updated as the project develops, and as more is learnt about the population changes and the impact trapping is having on the species."

Other figures in this quarter's project bulletin show 129 ferrets have also been caught by the trappers during the course of their work and an even greater number of rats – 1,352 in total.

The research project by PhD student Alice Helyar, to make a detailed study of all mink on the Isle of Taransay, is also now well under way and 21 mink have been caught and will be monitored throughout the summer. Results of these trials will help with future catching techniques, noting habitat preferences and the response of mink to removal of other mink in neighbouring areas.

Ends.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

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NOTES

Mink are not native to the Western Isles or even to the UK. Their presence in the area stems from mink farms, which closed down in the 1960s. They pose particular threats to wild birds as they will eat eggs, chicks and adult birds from internationally important bird sites. The Uists include some of Europe's most important bird sites and these are afforded protection under the EC Wild Birds Directive in designated Special Protection Areas (SPAs). The UK is required by the Directive to protect the interests of SPAs. As well as posing a serious threat to wildlife, they also have a damaging effect, directly or indirectly, on crofting, fishing, fish farming and tourism. The mink situation is very much a shared problem and it is in all interests to find a solution. Unfortunately, the only permanent solution is eradication, through a programme of humane lethal control.