



Hebridean Mink Project

Project Bulletin June 2002



Safeguarding our Wildlife

In this, our second edition, we bring you an update with what has been happening with the project since last November. Moving from Winter into Summer there is plenty to report!

NEWS

◆ **NEW PROJECT MANAGER APPOINTED**

Sugoto Roy replaced Paul Tyler as the new Project Manager. Sugoto is an ecologist with long-term experience of island ecology and management of the small Indian Mongoose on Mauritius, another problem carnivore introduced to many islands around the world. Since joining the Project, Sugoto has been setting up a temporary office in the Scarista School House in Harris and organising training for the trappers. He has also been establishing links with local agencies and organisations to raise awareness of the project and developing the management of the project. Sugoto can be contacted on 01859 550327. (s.roy@csl.gov.uk).

◆ **PROJECT TEAM COMPLETE**

The team of trappers has now been appointed and includes three part-time and nine full-time trappers. Before starting their programme of work all the trappers have undergone some intensive training. This is to enable them to make the best use of all the information and resources available for trapping the animals. They are also trained on animal welfare issues as well personal health and safety.

◆ **TRAPPING UPDATE**

Although a great deal of time has been spent on training and equipment sourcing, particularly in the early stages of the Project, 65 mink have been caught by the Project, 33 in Harris and 32 in the Uists. A total of 1300 traps are already in use, 650 each in Harris and the Uists, with a further 300 being deployed.

◆ **MINK IN SOUTH UIST AND ERISKAY**

In April, we had the rather disappointing news of the first mink being trapped in South Uist. Sightings have also been confirmed in Eriskay. As part of the mapping the overall distribution of the species we are very keen to hear of any suspected mink sightings. This will greatly assist how we target trapping effort in future. Please report sightings to Sugoto Roy on 01859 550327.

◆ **AWARENESS RAISING**

Moving into the tourist season we want to ensure that visitors understand about the project and do not disturb traps. The Project team have prepared a leaflet for distribution to local guesthouses and hotels, and the Project Manager will be writing articles for local publications to help keep people informed.

◆ **PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Public meetings are due to be held in both Harris and Benbecula during August at which the Project manager will give a presentation about the project and progress. There will be opportunity for questions and discussion of some of the more detailed aspects of the project. Dates and venues for the meetings will be advertised in local press. One of the purposes of the meetings will be to explore the merits of setting up a Local Liaison Group to enable local expertise to be fed into the project as well as informing local audiences about the aim of the project, progress or any problems.

◆ **WHAT ABOUT LEWIS AND HARRIS?**

At present the Project focuses on the Uists and South Harris. This has raised questions about the long-term approach of dealing with the problem across the whole of Harris and Lewis. But as well as eradicating mink in the Uists this phase will form the basis of a feasibility study to assess how the question of Lewis and Harris can be addressed. 'Phase 2' will address

Lewis and Harris but there is still insufficient information available to be specific about a second project.

◆ **THANKS FOR YOUR HELP**

The Hebridean Mink Project would like to thank the many local people who have helped with various aspects of the project particularly the reporting of mink sightings in South Uist and Eriskay. It is of great assistance to the project to receive any information of mink sightings and would ask that people continue to report these to Sugoto Roy on 01859 550327 (s.roy@csl.gov.uk). We also appreciate support from Customs and Excise who supplied a boat (5.3m RIB) to help trappers reach some of the more remote locations and to Seadog which has supplied two life jackets.

BACKGROUND

◆ **THE TROUBLE WITH MINK**

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 area afforded protection under the EC Wild Birds Directive in designated Special Protection Areas. 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 affect, directly or indirectly, on crofting, fishing, fishfarming and tourism. The mink situation is very much a shared problem and it is in all our interests to find a solution. Unfortunately the only permanent solution is eradication, through a programme of humane lethal control.

◆ **THE AIMS OF THE PROJECT**

The 'Hebridean Mink Project' aims to eradicate the alien predator, American mink, from the Uists and to dramatically reduce their numbers in Harris. The Project is being carried out in the interests of nature conservation, namely to protect threatened bird colonies of international significance. It has been underpinned by community liaison on the main issues and detailed research in the form of a feasibility study carried out by Central Science Laboratory. This project will be crucial in determining how the much bigger task of wider eradication throughout Lewis and Harris should be approached.

◆ **THE FUNDING AND THE PARTNERS**

The Hebridean Mink Project is bringing more than £1.65m of European, public and other funding to the Western Isles. It has been made possible after the presence of several European nature conservation areas in the Uists were used to attract half the money from the EU LIFE Nature Fund. This Fund aims to help the protection of 'Natura' sites designated under the EC Habitats and Wild Birds Directives. As part of the application, SNH confirmed a £443,000 contribution to the project, along with £150,000 from The Scottish Executive, £100,000 from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, £52,000 from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, £42,000 from Central Science Laboratory and £35,000 from Western Isles Enterprise. The Project constitutes a new novel partnership of these organisations.

For further information about the Hebridean Mink Project or to report mink sightings please contact Scottish Natural Heritage in Stornoway (Tel. 01851 705258) or the project manager Sugoto Roy on 01859 550327 (s.roy@csl.gov.uk).