

Mendip Hills
National
Landscape



Champion Species Fact Sheet

Water Vole

Arvicola amphibius



mendiphills-nl.org.uk/caring/nature-recovery-plan

Why a Champion Species?

- Fastest declining mammal species in the UK, having disappeared from over 95% of their range.
- UK Protected Species and S41 Threatened Species. On the Red List.
- Good indicators of a healthy water environment and very sensitive to poor riverbank, rhyne, and ditch management. They are also a charismatic species, which helps with public engagement!

Preferred habitat

- Wetlands and waterbodies such as reedbeds, ponds, and lakes.
- Waterways such as rivers, rhyne, and ditches.



Best time to see

- They do not hibernate but become less active in the winter, so the best time to see them is in the spring and summer.
- Although active in the daytime, they are incredibly shy and skittish, so you are unlikely to spot them unless you are very lucky! Listen for a distinctive 'plop' noise and safely look for their field signs near to the water's edge.

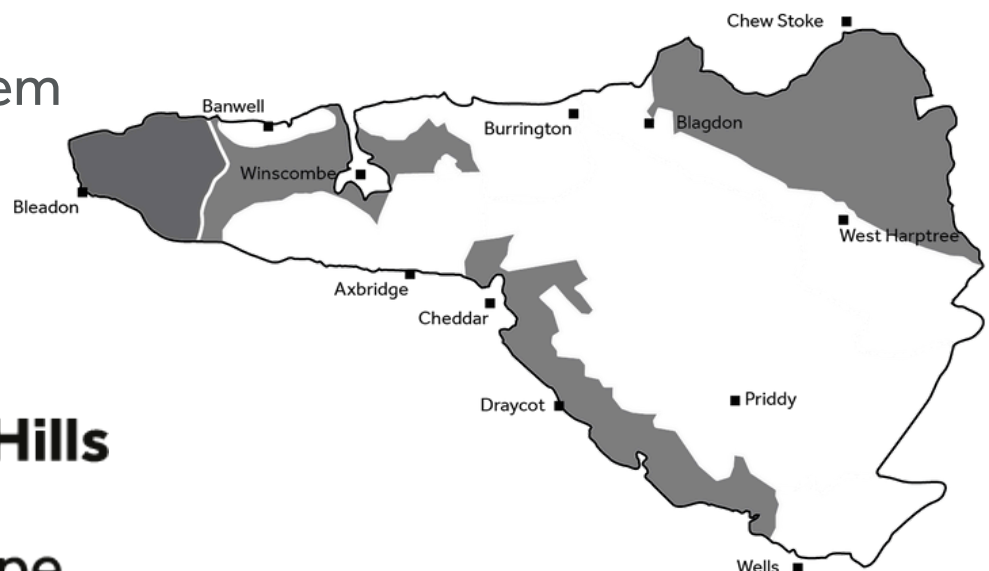
Points of interest

- The largest vole species in the UK, with chestnut brown fur, a blunt rounded nose, small, rounded ears and a short furry tail. They are sometimes known as the 'water rat' ('Ratty' from Wind in the Willows) but they are not the same species as the brown rat!
- They often cultivate a 'lawn' around their tennis ball-sized burrows, and their feeding stations are around the size of a dinner plate, where eaten vegetation is cropped at a very distinctive 45° angle.
- During the breeding season, they create latrines – piles of 'Tic-Tac' like poos!

Key threats

- Predation by the invasive, non-native American mink.
- Loss of suitable habitat through dredging and poor bankside management.
- Flooding and drought made worse by climate change.
- Poisoning due to misidentification as brown rats.
- Disturbance from dogs and predation by cats.

Where to find them



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