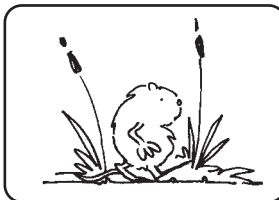


How to control rats when water voles may be present:-

- Always check for signs of water voles before controlling rats along waterways.
- If correct identification is in doubt seek the advice of a professional ecologist before taking further action - contact your local Wildlife Trust.
- Wherever possible, live capture cage traps should be used - check twice per day to release animals that you do not intend to catch.
- As water voles prefer areas with vegetation cover, site traps in the open or cut back vegetation if necessary.
- Avoid siting traps near the water's edge (no nearer than 2m) as water voles use the upper banks less often.
- Avoid the use of back-break traps. If these have to be used, place traps at least 5m from the waterway.
- Avoid the use of poison wherever possible. If poison has to be used, do not place poison inside burrows. It is illegal to block or obstruct water vole burrows.
- Where absolutely no alternative is feasible, poison should be covered or enclosed in a bait box. This should be placed at least 5m from the water's edge. Avoid the use of poisoned grain or pellets. Use wax or soap blocks instead. If possible, site the bait off the ground, as rats are more likely to climb than water voles.
- Regularly inspect and monitor the control site, clearing away poisoned corpses. If any dead water voles are found, stop and review the control method used. Please report any water vole sites to your local Wildlife Trust.

Normal precautions should be taken to avoid contraction of Weil's disease while working near water.

For details of your local Wildlife Trust contact
The Wildlife Trusts tel: 0870 0367711



Know Your Vole

Rat Control and Water Vole Conservation



T. Whittaker

Water vole



The Wildlife Trusts is a partnership of 47 Wildlife Trusts, across the UK, caring for almost 2,500 nature reserves. The partnership campaigns for the protection of wildlife and invests in the future by helping people of all ages to gain a greater appreciation and understanding of nature. The Wildlife Trusts have a membership of over 382,000 people. Further information can be found on our website www.wildlifetrusts.org

Pest control may lead to the unnecessary destruction of water vole colonies.

This leaflet explains how to control pests without damaging water voles.



Know your vole

Water voles are easily confused with rats. Rats are treated as pests but water voles are a legally protected species.

How can pest control affect water voles?

Controlling pests such as rats may lead to accidental destruction of water vole colonies. Damage occurs when water voles are mistaken for rats, or when control methods are used carelessly. Rats sometimes prey on young water voles so careful rat control can benefit water vole colonies.

What the law says

It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place that a water vole uses for shelter or protection. It is also an offence to disturb a water vole while it is using such a place. (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 5, Section 9[4]). Blocking water vole burrows is illegal. Placing traps or bait boxes into or in the way of water vole burrows could lead to prosecution. Offences carry a maximum penalty of £5000. The court may also take any vehicle or other equipment used to commit the offence.

Threats to water voles

Water voles have suffered the most dramatic decline of any British mammal in the last century. There is now only one vole for every 20 that were alive in 1900. The main causes for this decline have been loss and damage to habitat, and predation by American mink. Any activity that poses the slightest threat to water voles must therefore be undertaken with extreme care.

How can you help?

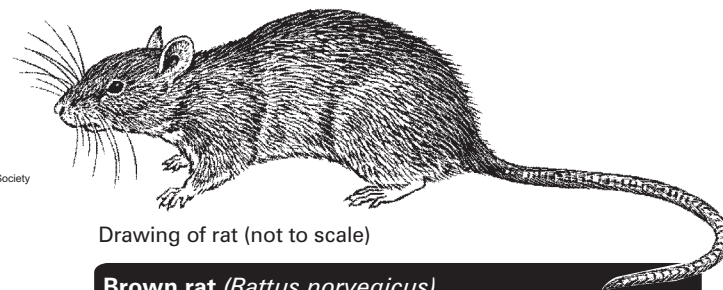
If you are controlling pests near water, check for signs of water voles before starting. Your local Wildlife Trust may be able to provide information on water vole presence at the site. Both water voles and rats burrow into the banks of most types of waterway. Water voles are usually restricted to within several metres of the water's edge. Use the chart overleaf to check for signs of water voles. If you find water voles and rats follow the advice in this leaflet. If in doubt, contact your local Wildlife Trust.



Drawing of water vole (not to scale)

Water vole (*Arvicola terrestris*)

Size and shape	Water voles have rounded bodies and grow to 320g, smaller than an adult male rat.
Colour	Water voles are generally mid-brown in colour with silky fur. Dark brown or black individuals may occur, especially in uplands.
Snout, ears and tail	Water voles have short blunt snouts. Their ears are almost hidden by fur. Their furry tail is two thirds of their body length.
Burrows	4-8cm diameter burrows usually found at the water's edge or up to 3m away in the bank. Circles of short nibbled vegetation are often found around holes of the higher burrows.
Paths	Usually one main track along water's edge, with some paths pushing up into vegetation higher up the bank. Paths are normally concealed in grass and stay near the water.
Droppings	Between spring and autumn droppings are left in piles of 5-100 usually within 30cm of water. In winter droppings are dispersed. Droppings are 5-10mm long and rounded at both ends. They have a putty-like texture, with very fine plant material visible. Green, brown, purplish or black in colour. No strong odour.
Feeding remains	The diet of water voles is mainly vegetarian. Water voles leave small piles of chopped vegetation (approx. 10cm long and cut at a 45 degree angle with grooved teeth-marks at ends) at feeding sites on banks.
Activity	Can be active during the day but more likely to be seen at dawn and dusk.
Footprints	Not a reliable guide.



Drawing of rat (not to scale)

Brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*)

Size and shape	Rats are bigger than water voles. Adult males weigh up to 500g.
Colour	Grey or brown with a paler underside.
Snout, ears and tail	Rats have pointed snouts and very obvious round ears. Their tails are as long as their bodies, and appear scaly and hairless.
Burrows	8-10cm diameter burrows may occur well away from the water's edge often with a heap of soil in a 'fan' shape outside the entrance.
Paths	A network of well trampled paths connecting all burrows. Paths may lead across open land away from the water.
Droppings	One or several left on paths or at the water's edge. Droppings are 12-15mm long, flat at one end and pointed at the other. Slimy or very soft texture, occasionally granular. Light brown to black in colour. Unpleasant odour of urine or ammonia.
Feeding remains	Rats are opportunist feeders and will eat a variety of foods. Remains of meals such as broken snail shells are sometimes found on the riverbank.
Activity	Largely nocturnal.
Footprints	Not a reliable guide.