

Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook

Occasional Titbits, Water Vole Special No. 39, September 2014

www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

Please forward or print out and pass on to anyone else who may be interested.

Water voles *Arvicola amphibius* (also called *Arvicola terrestris*)



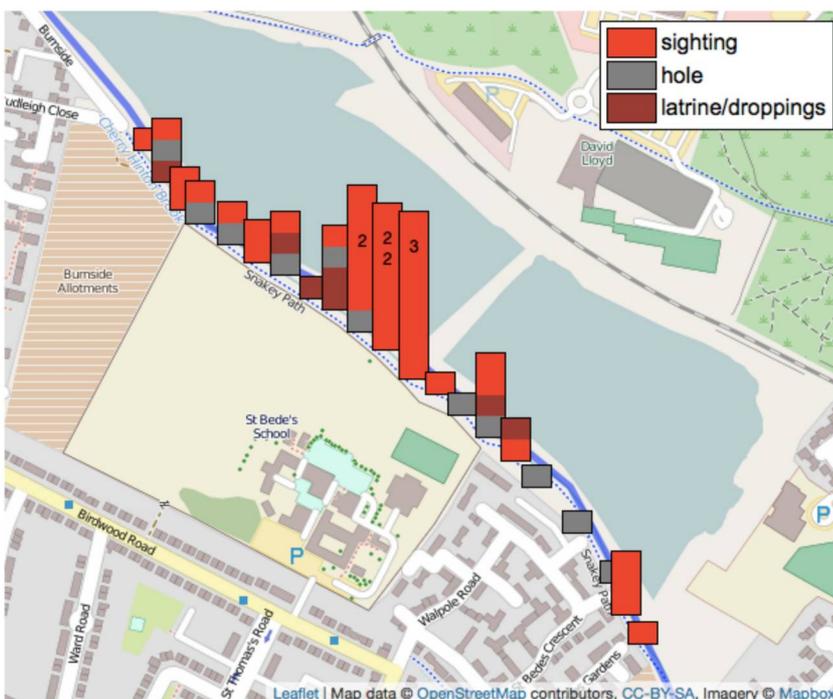
The water vole is an aquatic mammal found throughout Europe and once common in the UK. However, numbers here have declined dramatically since the early twentieth century and surveys show that overall they are still going down. We are thus privileged and justifiably excited to have what appears to be a healthy population on Cherry Hinton Brook.

We are building up a picture of where the water voles are most active and need your reports of sightings. Just email us date, time and what you saw and where. On Snakey Path, use the numbers on the lamp posts. The map below (interactive version on our website) only shows voles seen along Snakey Path between our interpretation board at the end of Budleigh Close and St Bede's Gardens. They have also been seen along Burnside and towards Sainsbury's.

Water voles are protected by law and it is an offence to disturb them, or damage, destroy, or obstruct access to, their burrows.

Water voles on video

At the end of May, RiverCare lent us a video camera with a movement and heat sensor. After a few false starts, Nicola Fawcett and Darren Gillings worked out how to position the camera and have been rewarded with excellent 20 second videos of water voles scuttling about at the edge of the brook. The first few are now on YouTube, linked from <http://friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk/Voles.html>.



The photos were taken by Darren Gillings – thanks Darren – and are copyright.

Water vole sightings on Cherry Hinton Brook
(2014-01-01 to 2014-07-31)

Our water vole web page!

We have created a page about water voles on our website where we will share news of the latest sightings, the photos we have got, and up-to-date information about water voles along Cherry Hinton Brook and Cambridgeshire.

Is a water vole a rat? No, although 'Ratty' in *The Wind in the Willows* was a water vole and although they are sometimes called 'water rats', water voles are not closely related to rats.

How to distinguish water voles from rats? The most obvious differences are that water voles have blunt noses and their ears are inconspicuous, being almost concealed in their fur. Water voles have relatively short tails, which are furry, unlike those of a rat, though this may not be obvious when they are in the water. Both water voles and rats can be found near streams and rivers and both are found along Cherry Hinton Brook.

Why have voles declined in number? Initially this was probably because changes to agricultural practices and the management of river banks reduced suitable habitat for water voles. Then in the 1920s mink (*Mustela vison*) escaped from fur farms and established themselves along our rivers and streams. For a mink a water vole is a bite-sized snack! Furthermore, mink are aggressive hunters and the females are small enough to get into water vole burrows.

Why are water voles doing relatively well along Cherry Hinton Brook? Water voles numbers are increasing in Cambridgeshire generally. One reason is that there is a lot of suitable habitat, especially in the fens, but importantly there are fewer mink in the county. There are active mink eradication programmes, including one in the Cam Valley and we have no records of mink on our patch. Water voles may be thriving this year because the mild winter meant more survived to breed in the spring.



Where do water voles live? They live in a system of burrows on river banks, with entrances both above and below the water line. Water voles live in colonies and during the breeding season both males and females establish territories, which they mark with piles of droppings, called latrines.

Further information The BBC's website (with links to videos) www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/European_Water_Vole . The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust website: www.gwct.org.uk/wildlife/research/mammals/water-vole/ .

For information on the position locally see www.wildlifebcn.org/news/2013/09/19/search-ratty .

CamLakes survey Cambridge City Council's Draft Local Plan includes a proposal for an Urban Country Park in the three chalk pits that adjoin the Brook, although this has not yet been designated, as the Plan has not yet been approved. Friends of Cherry Hinton Brook support the proposal that the lakes should be opened to the public, provided the important wildlife of the area is protected. The Cambridge Lakes Project, set up to lobby for the opening of the lakes, is running a survey to solicit opinions on how people would like to use the area if it is designated as a park. The survey is on their website www.camlakes.co.uk/ under the "Community Survey" heading. FCHB recommends that you contribute your views through this survey, and make sure our core concerns of wildlife conservation and protection are adequately represented, as the survey results will be widely publicised.

JOIN US! See our website www.friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk for our aims and activities.

To be taken off this email list, please email membership@friendsofcherryhintonbrook.org.uk

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