



Strategic Mink Control in Northern Scotland

Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland

Mink Control Officer

General Job Description

A. Introduction and Background

This document sets out the principle roles and job description of the Mink Control Officers.

The Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland (RAFTS), the University of Aberdeen, the Scottish Wildlife Trust and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) have formed a partnership to implement a two and half year project (April 2011-August 2013) to control and eradicate mink from the rivers of northwest and northeast Scotland. The project is funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, Tubney Charitable Trust, Cairngorms National Park Authority and the Scottish Government and the European Community Cairngorms, Highland, Moray, Rural Aberdeenshire and Rural Tayside Local Action Groups LEADER 2007-2013 Programme.

The Strategic Mink Control in Northern Scotland Project builds upon and expands the work of three previous and independently funded sister projects (the Cairngorms Water Vole Conservation Project; the North East of Scotland Water Vole Project; and the North West Highlands Mink Control Project). This large scale approach reflects the broader strategic approach to mink control proposed by SNH during 2009 and endorsed by SNH's Scientific Advisory Committee.

The overall objective of the project will be to secure multiple adjacent river catchments as mink-free areas, thereby protecting nationally significant populations of water voles, salmonids, ground nesting birds and other aspects and species of native riparian biodiversity. This will be achieved through continued use of a co-operative community-based approach in five areas within the overall geographic scope of the project.

The principle objectives of the Mink Control Project are to:

- To eradicate breeding mink from an area extending from the mid-Tay to the South Esk, around the east coast to the River Nairn; with a belt reaching from Dornoch and Cromarty on the east to Ullapool on the west, preventing mink encroachment to the far north.
- To ensure the long term sustainability of mink control in the project areas through the coordinated and resourced transfer of responsibility for ongoing mink management to local organisations.
- To raise awareness of the benefits of the community-based and adaptive management approach to invasive non-native species management

B. Principal Role and Job description

Each Mink Control Officer will be responsible to, and employed by, RAFTS as the lead partner in the project partnership. The Mink Control Officer will work as part of a team under the guidance of the





Mink Control Project Coordinator. Each Mink Control Officer will be responsible for a designated area and specific duties which may be allocated to team members according to their respective areas of expertise. However, the project has a team and collective responsibility for delivery so officers may need to work outside their core geographic area in some instances.

In addition to generic roles and responsibilities of all Mink Control Officers individual staff may have particular strengths relevant to the project objectives and activities e.g. website management, community education, publicity and promotion materials, field skills or volunteer training, that may be developed into lead roles within the project to reduce replication and support staff development. Such roles would be developed and considered by the team, the Project Coordinator, RAFTS and the Steering Group during project implementation.

Each Mink Control Officer will be responsible for the following areas of work:

Volunteer management, mink monitoring and trapping

- Coordinate, maintain and expand the existing network of wildlife management professionals and volunteers.

This is a community-based project and as such the post-holder will encourage as many volunteer operators as possible to undertake much of the mink raft checking and any subsequent trapping effort. Mink Control Officers will support this wider network and work closely with nominated representatives from the participating fishery trusts, each of whom already have good links with potential mink raft operators in their respective areas.

- Coordinate the management of the network of monitoring rafts and traps within their designated area.

The Mink Control Officer will have a crucial role in motivating volunteers and coordinating their efforts to ensure a systematic approach is maintained. In some areas, where there are gaps in volunteer coverage, they will have personal mink monitoring and trapping responsibilities. It will be essential that the Mink Control Officer works closely with each of the nominated fishery trust and other partner body representatives, to ensure that local coordination is as efficient as possible and there is no duplication of effort.

- Dispatch captured mink and collection of their carcasses.

Mink Control Officers will ensure that trapped mink are humanely dispatched, using an air pistol/gun and according to Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust protocols. The Mink Control Officer will ensure that mink carcasses are appropriately labelled with location and date of capture and stored, frozen, until such time as they can be forwarded to the University of Aberdeen, where essential morphometric data can be collected and any tissue samples required for molecular analysis can be taken. Using microsatellite DNA polymorphisms it is possible to investigate the population size of the mink population and provide information on pattern of re-colonisation.





- Maintain volunteer motivation

This is expected to be one of the most challenging aspects of this project. No evidence of mink on the rafts, raises two important issues;

- (i) Operators can rapidly lose interest and become complacent, and
- (ii) Lack of evidence cannot be taken as absolute confirmation that no mink have passed through the area.

The Mink Control Officers will, therefore, need to maintain volunteer motivation by encouraging participants to remain active and vigilant. One approach is to consider and develop understanding of the wider species monitoring benefits of running mink rafts. The distributions of some species in the project area are poorly understood and valuable records of, for example, water vole, otter and pine marten may be gathered through the use of mink rafts.

- Assist in the development, testing and implementation of measures and models for the eventual handover of responsibility for ongoing mink control and management to local organisations particularly, but not necessarily exclusively, individual rivers and fisheries trusts.

Awareness and Capacity Building

- Promote awareness of mink and the project generally, the native species that will benefit from mink control and other invasive non native species issues.

This will be through writing articles, attending events, website contributions etc, providing education (school visits, activity events and community talks), encouraging greater active participation, producing publicity material, dealing with press enquiries and contributing to project news-letters.

- Provide informal training

The Mink Control Officer will be required to provide informal training to individual volunteers, as required, that includes but is not limited to:

- The set-up, maintenance and running of the rafts;
- Humane dispatch of mink; and
- Data collection according to standardised protocols.

Monitoring and research

- Monitor the outcomes and impacts of the project.

The Mink Control Officer will be responsible for the collection of data using standardised protocols that include but are not limited to:

- Number and location of mink raft operators and trappers;
- Number of mink detected and trapped;





- Number and type of equipment dispatched to individual volunteers; and
- Information associated with other species affected by mink as agreed.

All data will be compiled and transferred to the Project Coordinator on a schedule to be determined.

- Coordinate surveys and data collection for research purposes

A significant factor in the success of control projects to date has been the incorporation of research findings into management measures. This has resulted in an adaptive management strategy that will be further developed. As such it may become necessary for the Mink Control Officer to coordinate or participate in surveys of species impacted by mink (e.g water voles) as well as in the provision of data for applied research aiming to optimise the management approach. The Project Coordinator will provide the link between the project and applied research.

Planning, budgets, progress reporting and fund raising

- Produce workplans, budgets and progress reports on a quarterly basis detailing work to be undertaken, estimated costs and progress made respectively. These will be produced in coordination with the other members of the team.
- Assist in fund raising for the project

This project represents one step in the implementation of the broader strategic approach to mink control proposed by SNH during 2009 and endorsed by SNH's Scientific Advisory Committee. It is, therefore, hoped that mink control work will expand to adjacent geographic areas in the future assuming that future funding can be secured and success of the current project demonstrated. This will of course also necessitate the consolidation and handover of the mink control effort to local organisations particularly, but not necessarily exclusively, individual rivers and fisheries trusts. Both these aspects will require funds and it is envisaged that the MCOs will work closely with the project coordinator and the partnership to assist in securing the necessary funds.

C. Management and Organisational Structure:

The project will be managed by RAFTS on behalf of the partnership whose other members, with RAFTS, will form the project Steering Group providing overall direction, guidance and support. The Project Coordinator will be responsible for co-ordinating the work of the Mink Control Project Officers and reporting this to the Steering Group.

The Mink Control Officers will report to the Mink Control Project Coordinator who in turn will report to the RAFTS Project Development Manager.





D. Key skills and qualifications:

These are challenging and exciting positions with scope for development and extension as the project is developed and implemented.

The following skills are required to be successful in the role. However, applicants without all of the skills below **may** be considered if they can demonstrate a genuine commitment and enthusiasm for the position and the potential and willingness to learn and develop necessary skills whilst in post.

1. Education and Experience:

- Educated to degree level or equivalent or with significant experience in invasive non native species and/or conservation management;
- **At least 2 years** experience in invasive non native species and/or conservation management;
- Experience in the financial and administrative management of grant supported or other projects;
- Experience of grant claim procedures and record keeping necessary to fulfil grant scheme requirements (particularly from European or public sector grant schemes);
- Experience in the management and coordination of volunteers would be desirable;
- Experience of working in, coordinating or managing partnership projects;
- A good knowledge of relevant Scottish and UK environmental legislation is essential; and
- Specialist knowledge of mink or other mammal ecology or control would be advantageous.

2. Work Based and Personal Skills:

- Excellent communication skills (written and oral);
- Excellent organisational abilities and able to prioritise, with management support, multiple, perhaps competing, work streams;
- A good eye for and attention to detail;
- Able to work individually, as part of a small team and on own initiative;
- The ability to think creatively and flexibly in order to achieve the immediate and long term sustainability objectives of the project;
- Experienced in use of standard computing packages (particularly excel, word and powerpoint);
- GIS and website management experience would be advantageous; and
- The ability to think creatively and flexibly in order to contribute to the achievement of the immediate and long term project strategy and development objectives.

3. Other:

- A full clean driving licence is essential;
- A willingness to travel across the project area and elsewhere in Scotland as required; and
- A desire to make a real difference to environmental management in Scotland and an empathy with the charitable and voluntary sector.

