

Video transcription with timings for Kielder Water Heritage Project

History of the Water Vole in Kielder: Kevin O'Hara, Conservation Officer, Northumberland Wildlife Trust

Time	Speaker	Discussion
0.00	Kevin	<p>The sad state of affairs is that we have got a creature in the UK as in many countries around the world where animals have been introduced, either deliberately or accidentally or whatever, in the face of the north American mink. [0.17] The water vole is a very interesting sort of creature in itself, because, its name is quite misleading, it is not actually a water vole. It is actually a very large land vole, but changes in its entire environment over many many years, I mean thousands of years, have pushed the water vole to, in certain parts of its range which goes right across Europe, to extremes. [0.42]</p> <p>Then all these things start to impact on all sorts of creatures over many many years. But, in more recent years i.e. the 1920s and fashion trends and things like that; fur farming comes along. You know, people no longer need to wear fur just for protection, it comes in a fashion sense. [1.05] Then you've got an introduction of many creatures for the fur trade into the UK. One of which is the main culprit in the poor decline and story of the water vole, the north American mink, introduced probably in the 1920s to the UK. It promptly escaped from ill-kept fur farming establishments and things like that. [0.28] But it continued to escape in various degrees for many many years, but never really had an impact, never really made itself or its presence known. [0.39]</p> <p>The culmination of effects that happened in the late 1950s though saw its opportunistic, sort of, ability to come to the fore. It's a weasel, it's a large weasel, you know what I mean, from north America and like all weasels it's opportunistic, it's intelligent, it's clever. [0.58] It will utilise everything in its power to get what it wants. The culmination of different effects that happened was basically otter decline. [2.08] The otter is our largest native weasel, lives in exactly the same circumstances as the mink and it declined, which left a very big open range for mink to occupy. Otters decline because, as we well know, organochlorine pesticides and things like that entering the food chain. [2.30] But the mink has the ability to hunt 50/50 from both land and water, so it doesn't get that same effect in terms of, and because it arrived just as things were starting to decline, whereas the otter had built up lots of poisons, it wasn't it was nice and clean. [2.48]</p> <p>Thankfully, you know, like they say, in more recent years the otter has started to return and once the otter started to return mink numbers have fallen in a sense you know what I mean. It has given us this</p>

		<p>opportunity to capitalise on that. [3.05] Otters have returned and found this non-native living in its bed basically. You know what I mean, they live in exactly the same environment. Otters are massive bigger creatures than mink and are very much more antagonistic towards them. To the extent that they will kill them if they actually come across them, you know what I mean.</p>
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