

Water vole surveys - When do I need a licence?

Many people undertake water vole surveys. The information that is collected can have a positive benefit for nature conservation. In many cases surveys can be carried out without the need for a licence.

To determine whether a licence is necessary you need to consider whether you are likely to commit an action which is otherwise illegal. The legal protection for water voles is described below. If you propose to undertake surveys, which will result in disturbance to water voles then you will need to apply for a licence from the Natural Resources Wales (NRW).

Licence application forms can be downloaded from the NRW website

Legal protection for Water voles

In Wales water voles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) through inclusion in Schedule 5.

Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(as amended) (W&CA) it is illegal to:-

- intentionally kills, injures or takes any wild water vole. 9(1)
- possess or control any live or dead wild water vole or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal. 9(2)
- intentionally or recklessly damage or destroy, or obstruct access to, any structure or place which any wild water vole uses for shelter or protection 9(4)(a); or
- intentionally or recklessly disturb any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose. 9(4)(b)
- sells, offers or exposes for sale, or has in his possession or transports for the purpose of sale, any live or dead wild water vole, or any part of, or anything derived from, such an animal 9(5)(a); or
- publishes or causes to be published any advertisement likely to be understood as conveying that he buys or sells, or intends to buy or sell, any of those things 9(5)(b),

The following operations do not, in the view of NRW, require a licence as no offence is likely to be committed

1. Walking river banks or wading along the river to look for signs of water voles (droppings, feeding stations, burrows). This could include walking past known burrows and carrying out a brief exterior examination.
2. Stopping to examine potential burrows (as there is no intention of disturbing a water vole). However, if a water vole is seen to be present you should withdraw immediately.
3. Watching a known water vole site from a distance or from concealment to see if it is occupied, providing there is no intention of disturbing the water vole.
4. Collecting material from water vole feeding stations.

Detailed and prolonged examination of a known water vole burrow which would cause disturbance to any water voles present would require a licence.

If you are going to interfere with burrows e.g. block with hay, and disturb water voles in their burrows or trap them then you will need a licence. If you are simply surveying for holes, droppings and feeding signs you will not.