

Water Vole Habitat Maintenance

Factsheet



In the UK, water voles and their habitat are fully protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). It is therefore an offence to:

- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place used by a water vole for shelter or protection;
- intentionally or recklessly disturb water voles whilst occupying a structure or place used for that purpose;
- intentionally kill, injure or take water voles.



This fact sheet includes maintenance techniques that will help you carry out legally-acceptable ditch work that protects water vole and other species.

The photos show good habitat management.

If bankside vegetation inhabited by water vole is cut too short, it is likely to deprive the species of food and reduce important cover from predators, such as the American mink.

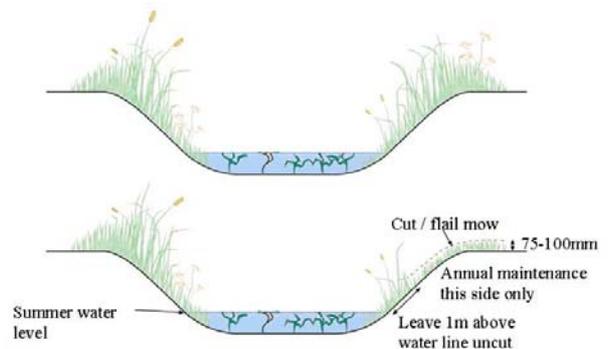
It's therefore vital that a margin of longer and denser vegetation is retained on the bank just above the water's edge. Ideally, the opposite bank should be left entirely uncut until the year after, thus maintaining the banks in rotation.



It's important to know that when a watercourse is too overgrown, it can eventually provide poor habitat for water voles due to over-shading by trees and a reduction in grasses and reeds. Bank strimming is therefore essential in conserving this legally-protected habitat, provided it is not too intensive and it avoids the end of March through until August. This is an important time for breeding water voles and other species protected by law, such as spawning fish and nesting birds.

Works to remove silt and weed from a watercourse must also take care not to damage the banks as this could harm water voles and is likely to expose their burrows, making them more vulnerable to predators.

Vegetation next to the bank should therefore be retained, with weed and silt taken from the middle of the channel. Silt and weed should be deposited at least 5 metres away from the top of the bank to avoid smothering burrows and damaging important habitats.



Good water vole habitat maintenance – Example 1

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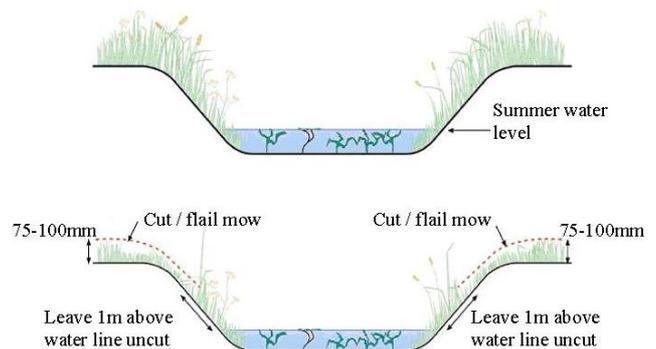
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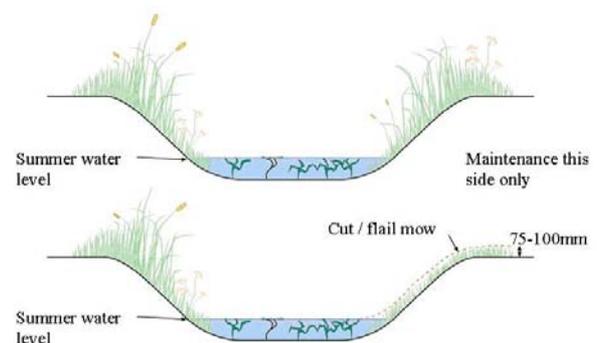
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Good water vole habitat maintenance – Example 2



Good water vole habitat maintenance – Example 3

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