

Environmental Standard Operating Procedure 10

Water Vole Mitigation (Dredging disposal & Dyke restoration)

Water edge habitats associated with drainage ditches, setback areas, broads and other water bodies provide habitat for water vole, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority species which receives full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Dredging disposal and dyke restoration work are examples of tasks which can impact on water voles. Working practices aim to comply with the protected species legislation & best practice guidance which protects both the animals and their habitat.

Aim

To avoid disturbance, killing and injury to water voles where works have the potential to impact the species.

Environmental Risk

Impact	Likelihood	Mitigation
Killing and injury of water voles in burrows e.g crushing by heavy machinery.	High	Displace water voles from works area
Destruction of burrows by machinery or sediment.	High	Displace water voles from works area



Delivery Method

- Mitigation requires the cutting and removal of water edge vegetation. This method reduces the suitability of the works area for water vole by removing cover and food. By making the works area less suitable, water voles will be temporarily displaced to allow works to proceed.

Environmental Standard Operating Procedure 10

Water Vole Mitigation (Dredging disposal & Dyke restoration)

Standard Procedure

- **6 months before start date** – Environment Officer (EO) to identify work area (e.g dyke for restoration or set back area) through consultation with Environment and Design Team.
- **April to September** – EO to survey works area to assess water vole potential and determine mitigation requirements. Area to be cut will be advised by EO depending survey findings of water vole activity. Areas commonly cut include dyke edges and dredging disposal site margins.
- **September/October or March** – cut vegetation to ground level in areas identified by EO by hand operated cutters or tractor mounted cutters where appropriate;
- When cutting water edge habitats, cutting must include accessible vegetation growing in the water and all bankside vegetation to 3m from the water's edge;
- Rake off all arisings to uncover burrows and expose bare ground as far as possible and remove cuttings off site or outside the works area;
- Avoid excessive trampling along water's edge and bankside habitat as far as possible;
- Cutting must continue within works area to maintain short vegetation height until works start. EO to monitor for signs of water voles during this period to advise on requirement of repeated cuts.
- **Water vole trapping and translocation** – if water voles cannot be displaced from the works area by vegetation removal, trapping and translocation may be required;
- Trapping and translocation carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist.
- **Works start:** commence works when water voles displaced.

Consultation Required

- **Broads Authority internal** – Environment Officers
- **External** – Natural England if licence is required.

Further Information

Strachan et al (2011) Water vole Conservation Handbook 3rd Edition.

Natural England website

<http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/wildlife/species/watervoles.aspx>