

American Mink

Species Description

Scientific name: *Mustela vison*

AKA: Feral Mink and Minc (Welsh)

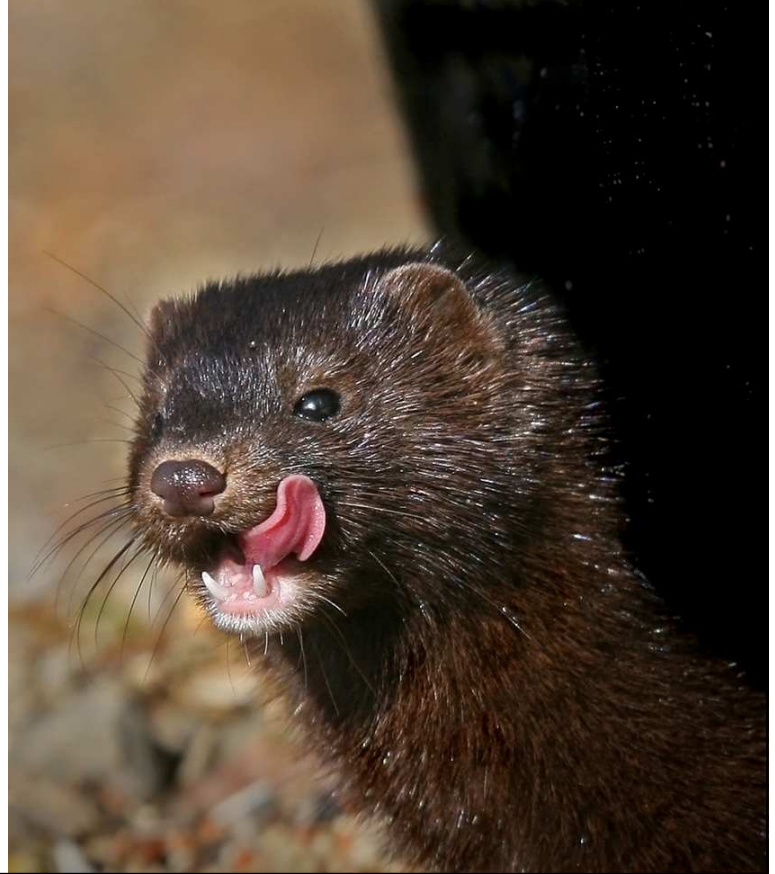
Native to: North America

Habitat: Aquatic habitats, including coastal, but mainly rivers and lakes

Established throughout the UK. Mostly nocturnal or active at dusk (but may be active at any time). Introduced for fur farming in the 1920s, with a peak in the 1960s. Established in the wild as a result of escapes and deliberate introductions. First recorded breeding in the wild in 1956. Has significant impact on native wildlife, especially water voles, sea birds, domestic fowl and fish on which it predates.

American mink is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 with respect to England, Wales and Scotland. As such it is an offence to release or allow the escape of this species into the wild.

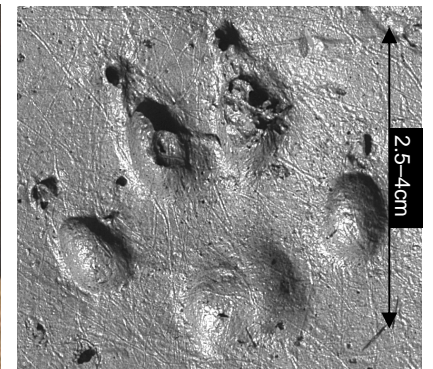
For details of legislation go to www.nonnativespecies.org/legislation.



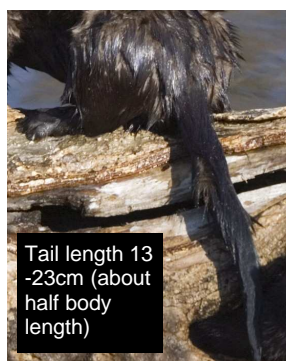
Key ID Features



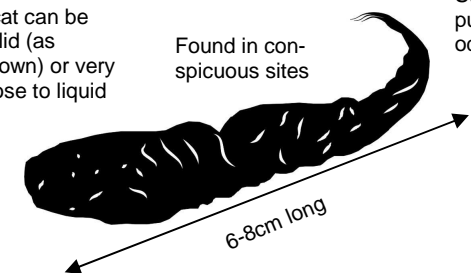
Usually has white patches on chin and throat (small amounts of white fur may be present on the upper lip)



Tracks may form paths leading to water, occasional signs of tail dragging in mud



Scat can be solid (as shown) or very loose to liquid



Strong pungent odour

Usually contains fur, pieces of bone and feather

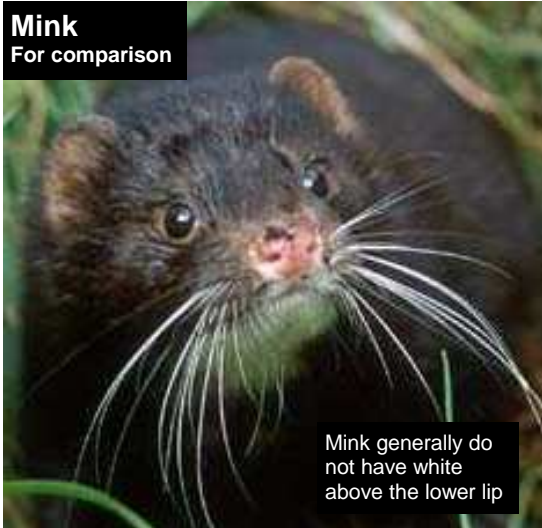
Sausage-like, but twisted and drawn out to a point

Found in conspicuous sites

Similar Species

Mink are very similar to polecats but can be distinguished by the white markings on their face. While ferrets are also similar size and shape, they are usually very different in colour. Note that polecats and ferrets may interbreed producing offspring with intermediate characteristics. The only other species that may be confused with mink is otter, however this is easily distinguished by its considerably larger size as well as through field signs such as tracks.

Mink For comparison



Mink generally do not have white above the lower lip

Mink are elusive and field signs are therefore useful to aid identification, however these will not allow you to distinguish between mink and polecat

Polecat Native (*Mustela putorius*)

White tips to ears



White above upper lip creates a mask

Otter Native (*Lutra lutra*)

Pale upper and lower lips, pale cheek patches



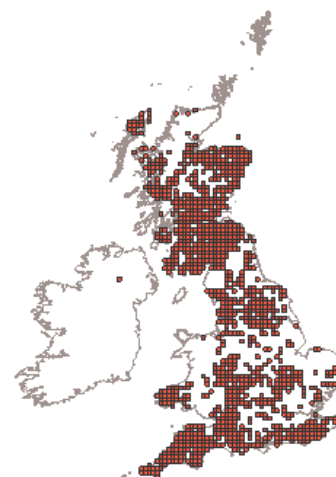
Much larger- twice the length and 7-10 times the weight (1-1.2m long from head to tail, 7.5-10.3kg weight)

Chestnut brown fur with paler underside

Distribution

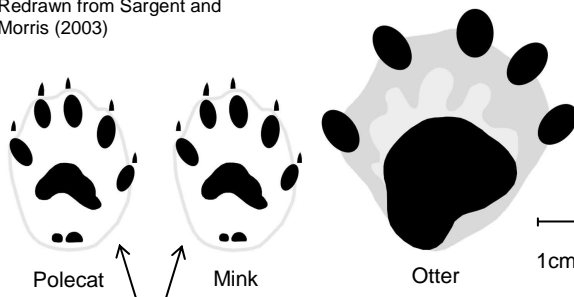
Widespread throughout Britain, limited mainly to aquatic habitats, population stable

Source: NBN Gateway. Check website for current distribution



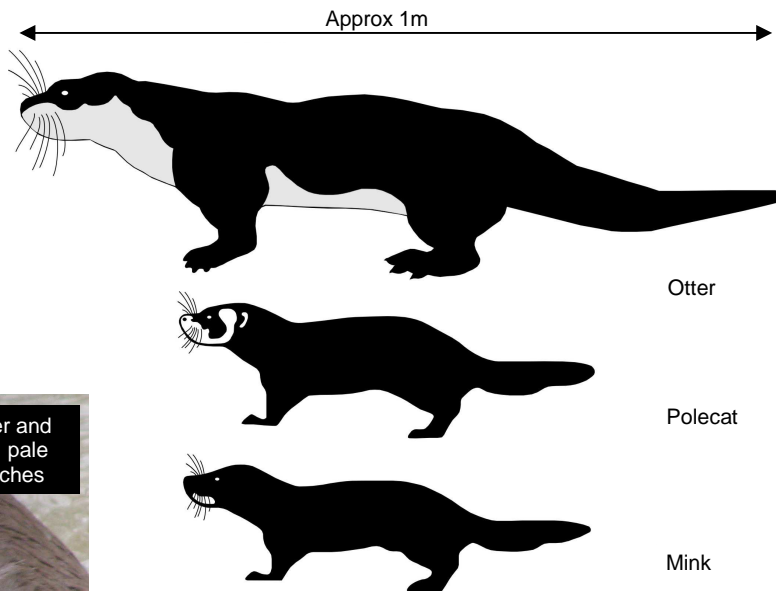
Tracks

Redrawn from Sargent and Morris (2003)



Note that mink and polecat prints are identical

Size and Shape



References and further reading:

Bang, P and Dahlstrom, P (2006) "Animal Tracks and Signs. OUP Pocket Guide Series". Oxford University Press

MacDonald, D (2005) "Collins Field Guide to the Mammals of Britain and Europe". Harper Collins

Sargent, G, and Morris, P, (2003). "How to find and identify mammals". The Mammal Society

Sterry, P (2005) "Collins Complete British Animals". Harper Collins