

## Water Voles Release

### Details

Clients Highways Agency

Date June 2004-June 2006

Location Kent

Working with Capita Symonds

Water voles that were carefully re-homed in temporary accommodation during the construction of the A249 Iwade Bypass to Queenborough Improvement Scheme have been released back into the wild on the Isle of Sheppey.

Prior to the construction works commencing, advanced environmental surveys were carried out to identify any wildlife likely to be affected by the scheme. As a result, during the autumn of 2003, 48 water voles were carefully removed to temporary accommodation in agreement with the Environment Agency and English Nature, using approved methods.

Library image of a water vole



Roads Minister, Dr Stephen Ladyman said: "The need to protect our environment is a key issue for the Government and influenced the design of the A249 Improvement Scheme. I am delighted these voles have been released back into their natural habitat."

The voles were housed by a water vole expert in temporary protected enclosures (mostly in Kent), with provision of flora such as that they would use in their natural habitat. Water voles are rapidly declining in the UK and their habitat, affected by development and changes to land drainage, is subject to national legislation. A predator of the vole is the mink and an increase in mink numbers has affected that of voles.

The adult water vole is approximately the same size as an adult guinea pig - it has a blunt nose, short round ears and rodent like dark brown fur and looks similar to Ratty from *Wind in the Willows*. The species is herbivorous (vegetarian). Environmental experts are able to identify areas that water voles inhabit from burrows, droppings and feeding signs - for example, the voles leave piles of cut vegetation on which they feed, each piece up to 10cm long, chewed off at a diagonal angle.

Once the voles had been removed from site, compensation ditches were created and planted with appropriate food and cover species in areas not affected by the works, to create a suitable new habitat for the voles.

The new ditches were protected by exclusion fencing until the new habitat was sufficiently established to support the animals. The voles have thrived whilst in captivity, expanding in numbers, and have been used to populate other sites as well as those local to their original home.

Rachael Riley, Carillion Project Environment Advisor said: "It has taken time for the plants to establish, so that there is enough food and cover species for the voles when they return. The ditches we created are now ready to support the vole colony. The successful release of these voles back to the wild is a huge reward for everyone involved in the scheme."



Water vole being released close to A249 construction site