



Coversheet  
for  
Guidelines for selection of biological SSSIs

Rationale  
Operational approach and criteria  
Detailed guidelines for habitats and species groups

To see other sections of the Guidelines for selection of biological SSSIs visit  
<http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-2303>

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## ADDITION TO GUIDELINES FOR THE SELECTION OF BIOLOGICAL SSSIS

### Chapter 13 Mammals

1.9A The water vole has shown the most rapid decline recorded for any mammal in the UK and strong populations are now distributed patchily across Great Britain. The species is most closely associated with static or slow-flowing waterways with steep banks and a dense fringe of emergent and riparian vegetation, but it is found in sites as diverse as large reedbeds and upland peatlands. Many sites which retain populations are those where the voles have been able to avoid predation by the introduced American mink. This can be either because of the structural diversity of the site (eg reedbeds) or because the low productivity means there are few opportunities for mink to occupy the area permanently (upland sites).

#### 3.3A *Water vole*

3.3A.1 In the lowlands, large reedbeds appear most likely to retain populations in the long-term. Other sites which have retained good populations include rivers with significant trout or salmon fishing interest and hence a high level of mink control. Up to two sites per AOS should be considered for notification, with preference being given to sites that have already been selected for their habitat interest. Sites should be selected on the basis of the size of their water vole population and should have a minimum of 2 km of suitable bankside vegetation with widespread signs of water voles. For waterways more than 3 m wide each bank may be considered separately.

For large reedbeds, boundaries should follow the natural edge of the habitat. For waterways or grazing marsh, boundaries should follow, where possible, a surface feature lying 5 – 10 m from the water's edge.

3.3A.2 In the uplands, it appears that water voles occur as metapopulations, showing local extinctions and recolonisations. Water vole SSSIs in such areas thus need to take account of this and cover areas large enough to maintain a complete metapopulation. Up to two sites per AOS should be considered and sites should be selected to cover the upper catchments of river systems where surveys have shown that water voles occur widely, even though they may be at low overall densities. Boundaries should not be constrained by watersheds, as a single water vole metapopulation may occupy the headwaters of more than one river system.