

# WATER VOLE SURVEY



Site name      Site of proposed canal connections to the River Thames  
and lake, opposite Culham

Client:         The Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal Trust

Date:            14 November 2005



**ecoconsult**  
23 Brumcombe Lane  
Bayworth  
Abingdon  
Oxfordshire OX13 6QU  
t: 01865 327976  
f: 01865 736981  
info@eco-consult.co.uk

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Methodology .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Data search .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Survey results .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Conclusions .....</b>	<b>6</b>
	<b>Appendix A: photos .....</b>	<b>7</b>

NB. Information on legally protected, rare or vulnerable species may appear in ecological reports. In such cases it is recommended that appropriate caution be used when circulating copies. Whilst all due and reasonable care is taken in the preparation of reports, EcoConsult Ltd accept no responsibility whatsoever for any consequences of the release of this report to third parties.

© ecoconsult ltd 2005

# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Ecoconsult has been commissioned by the Wiltshire and Berkshire Canal Trust to undertake water vole surveys at the proposed canal connections to the River Thames opposite Culham and a gravel pit lake to the west.

## **Water Voles**

- 1.2 The water vole *Arvicola terrestris* is Britain's fastest declining mammal. It is now estimated that the species has been lost from 95% of the sites where it occurred earlier in the twentieth century, with the remaining populations fragmented and under serious threat from local extinction. There are a number of factors contributing to this decline including the loss of habitat, changes in land management and predation by the North American mink.

## **Legislation**

- 1.3 Since April 1998 the water vole has received legal protection through its inclusion in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in respect of section 9 (4) only. This means that it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly:

- damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which water voles use for shelter or protection
- disturb water voles while they are using such a place

There is, therefore, an obligation on those who maintain watercourses and ditches to ensure that:

- a water vole survey is completed prior to any disturbance to the watercourse
- appropriate systems are in place to avoid damage to the water course where water voles are present

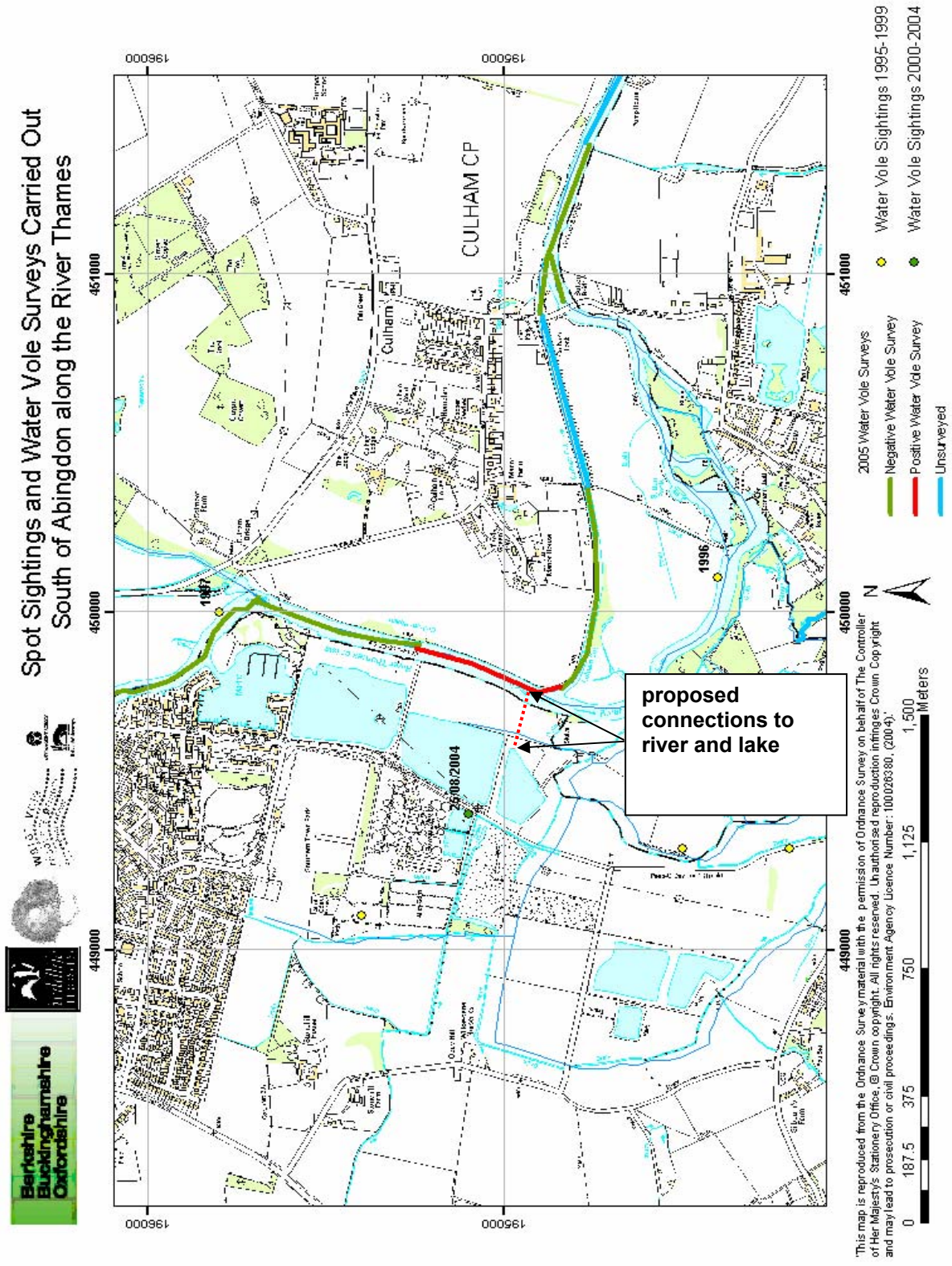
## 2 Methodology

- 2.1 The site was visited on 14 November 2005. A search was carried out for signs of water voles (i.e. sightings, latrines, burrows, feeding signs, tracks, runs and lawns) along the banks of the gravel pit lake and River Thames where the new canal link is proposed.
- 2.2 A data search for water vole records was obtained from the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Water Vole Recovery Project.

### 3 Data search

- 3.1 The data search is given in figure 1. This shows that the Thames at this location has been surveyed in the past and that positive signs were found along the stretch where the canal connection is proposed.
- 3.2 Examination of the original survey reports shows that water vole burrows and other signs were all located on the east bank of the Thames with the exception of one record of 2 runs with burrows about 100m north of the proposed connection on the west bank of the Thames.

Figure 1: Water vole data search



## 4 Survey results

- 4.1 No water voles or their signs were located at the proposed connections or within 20m either side.

### *habitat suitability for water voles*

- 4.2 The bank along the gravel pit lake supports suitable habitat for water voles.
- 4.3 The western bank of the Thames at this location supports a line of trees (mostly common alder) which heavily shades the bank. There is consequently very little marginal vegetation which provides cover and food resources for water voles.
- 4.4 The proposed connection with the Thames is heavily poached by cattle resulting in a sandy bay with very limited burrowing opportunities for water voles.
- 4.5 The eastern bank of the Thames supports more marginal vegetation and provides more suitable habitat for water voles.

## 5 Conclusions

- 5.1 Water voles have been recorded in the recent past and are likely to still occur on this stretch of the River Thames.
- 5.2 Water voles do not currently occur at or near to the proposed connections of the canal with the Thames (on the western bank) and lake.
- 5.3 The habitat along the western bank of the Thames at this point is suboptimal for water voles and supports very little marginal vegetation.
- 5.4 The habitat on the lake margins is suitable for water voles.



## Appendix A: photos



looking south from proposed connection with the Thames along western bank showing trees (and hence shading) along bank



looking north from proposed connection with the Thames along western bank showing trees (and hence shading) along bank



looking to proposed connection with lake



looking along proposed route of canal to connection with lake