

## Water mammal monitoring on Grand Western Canal



On Wednesday 7th June monitoring of water mammals at the Grand Western Canal Country Park and Local Nature Reserve began with the launch of a 'mink raft'.

The Sampford Peverell Society, in partnership with the Canal Ranger Service, has constructed the special raft which will be moored at points along the canal within the parish of Sampford Peverell.

Water mammals are inquisitive by nature and the raft has a clay pad on which their tracks will be left. Volunteers from the Sampford Peverell Society will check the raft regularly and record their findings.

The Canal Ranger Service is particularly keen to find out if American mink are present on the canal. This alien invader is thought to be largely to blame for the national decline in water voles, which were once abundant on the canal, but have not been recorded in the Country Park in the last decade. They are extremely scarce, if not extinct, in Devon. Efforts, coordinated by the Environment Agency, are underway to support the recovery of water voles in the county.

The monitoring will also shed more light on which native water mammals, such as otters, bank voles and water shrews are living in the Country Park. The canal is known to be popular with otters, which leave their spraint (droppings) under bridges. There is some evidence to suggest that the recovery of otter populations in the South West over the last decade has, to a large degree, led to a decline in the presence of mink on the waterways of Devon and Cornwall.

Canal Manager, Mark Baker, said: "We are very keen to hear of any sightings of mink within the canal corridor. Mink are usually dark brown or black and 50-70cm long, including their bushy tails. They are much smaller than otters and are not such accomplished or regular swimmers." People with information should telephone 01884 254072.

The Sampford Peverell Society exists to research and record all aspects of the history of Sampford Peverell, including its natural history. There is an enthusiastic Natural History Group, which has a programme of events arranged throughout the summer.



Photo of American Mink, *Mustela vison* by Alastair Driver

## Bridge Restoration

Historic bridges along the canal have been getting a makeover this summer with Warnicombe Bridge, Swing Bridge, Westcott Bridge and the Dudley Weatherley Jubilee Bridge getting a new coat of paint. East Manley Bridge, Swing Bridge and Westcott Bridge all required some repair work including extensive re-pointing.