

SOUTH HOLLAND IDB CONSERVATION REPORT – JUNE 2023

1.0 MINK CONTROL PROGRAMME

Since mink trapping with Remoti units started in July 2020, a total of 30 mink have been caught, as shown in the table below:

Year	Number caught
2020	23
2021	3
2022	4
2023 (to date)	0
Total	30

Capture details of the two caught since the last report are as follows:

Capture date	Location
25 th September 2022	Fleet Haven Drain, Coffee Tan Sluice
26 th October 2022	Main Drain, Foreman's Bridge

The mink project continues to be one of the most important projects that the SHIDB contribute to. Catches remain low in the core area as a result of the “mopping up” of animals in the buffer area that includes the SHIDB catchment.

The data on genetics and mink dispersal continues at Cambridge University and can only happen as the results and efforts of those involved. These results will be particularly important as we near the end of the project when targeted trapping and other techniques will need to be employed to find the location of those remaining animals.

The project is now expanding west into Bedfordshire and south into South London, Kent and Sussex. The project continues to draw attention from all corners of the UK including the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

The Water Life Recovery Trust website for up to date news, newsletters, blogs and how to report further mink sightings can be found [here](#).

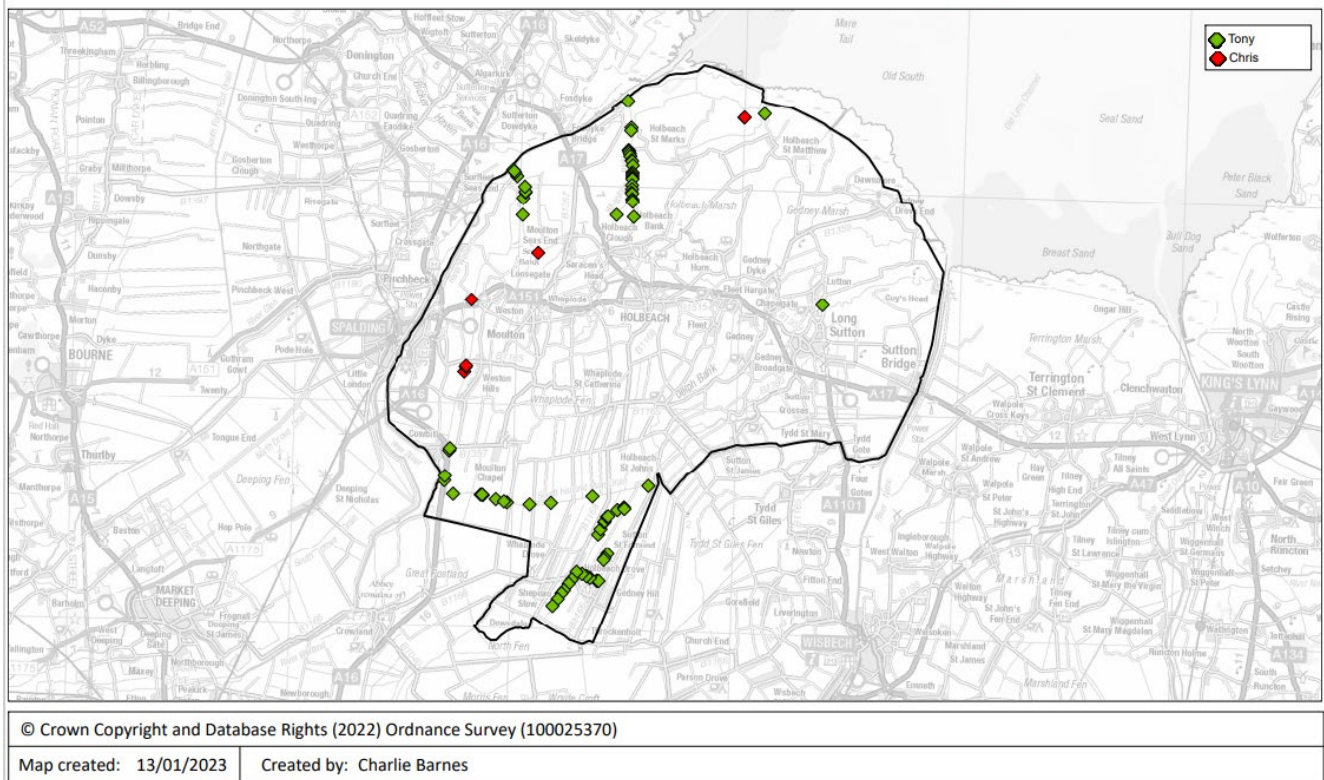
2.0 DATA COLLECTION BY STAFF

2.1 Water Vole

Data loggers continue to be used by two of the Board's excavator drivers to record water vole sightings, as well as the “What 3 Words” app which is available to all operatives. The results of the 2022/2023 cutting season were sent to the Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership for the information to be downloaded into their records.

A comparison with previous years sightings is shown below:

Cutting season	Number of water vole sightings
2015	146
2016	254
2017	146
2018	86
2019	135
2020	46
2021	94
2022	74



Water vole sighting locations from Data Loggers 2022/23

3.0 OWL / KESTREL BOXES

The annual owl / kestrel box survey was carried out in June 2022 by the Wildlife Conservation Partnership and an IDB officer. It was a reduced survey this year (15 poles out of the usual 23 surveyed), but even so, it would appear to have been another successful year, with the following being noted at the time of the survey:

- Kestrel – 9 chicks
- Barn Owl – 19 chicks + 4 eggs

3 new Barn Owl / Kestrel boxes have been purchased during the reporting period. These will be used to replace some of the old boxes which are now becoming dilapidated due to age. 20 new poles have been purchased during the reporting period to replace old poles which have become unsafe due to age. 16 of the new poles have been erected in this period. The final poles purchased will be installed during the winter of 2023-2024.

4.0 GRASS SNAKE NESTING PILES

The two Grass snake nesting piles which were constructed last year were checked in May of this year for signs of use. These piles are designed to provide a hospitable place for female grass snakes to lay their eggs. No traces of eggs were found within the piles unfortunately.

Officers have decided not to construct piles this year as it is felt that previous piles were likely to have been built too late in the season. Instead, nesting piles will be reconstructed in March 2024 for the following 2024 summer breeding season and will be monitored in Winter 2024 prior to reconstruction or building the next season.



Grass snake nesting pile checked for eggs on 04 May 2023

5.0 BATS

The Board currently have bat boxes installed at five pumping station sites. These boxes were inspected on 08 June 2023, and it was found that none are currently in use. The boxes were cleaned of cobwebs to encourage use in the future.

6.0 OTTER SURVEY

As part of the Board's BAP, the environmental team monitor certain locations in the South Holland Drainage District for otter. In previous years, the survey has been undertaken across 8 locations, however an additional 2 locations were added for the 2022 survey. This annual survey is carried out to understand the use of these haul out sites by otters through the area. Otter signs by way of spraint, footprint and runs continue to be found at 7 of the original 8 locations monitored, indicating that otter populations continue to be prevalent within the South Holland Internal Drainage District. The additional 2 locations displayed no signs of otter presence. The results of last year's survey, undertaken in October 2022, are shown below:

LOCATION	2022 (Oct)
1	No signs
2	Otter spraint x3-4 piles
3	No signs
4	Otter Spraint, scratches in the ground present
5	Otter spraint and footprints present
6	Otter slide, prints and spraint present.
7	Possible otter spraint on sand bags
8	Otter spraint x10+ piles
9	Otter spraint x2
10	No signs



Otter slide



Otter footprints



Otter spraint



Otter feeding remains, fish bones

Various photos showing evidence of otter.

Use of the artificial otter holt, indicated by spraint close to the holt entrance, were also observed as part of the monitoring programme.

7.0 SAND MARTIN NEST SITE – SOUTH HOLLAND MAIN DRAIN HLS AREA

The Sand Martin cliffs are due to be maintained this coming winter. The vertical face will be re-instated and areas of slumped material removed to improve the nesting habitat for Sand Martin.

Over 100 nesting holes were noted on this bank this year. However, bird activity was significantly less than previous years.



The Sand Martin colony with evidence of slumping of silts on the front face of the wall

8.0 SPINY MASON WASP – SOUTH HOLLAND MAIN DRAIN HLS AREA

Officers observed approximately 200 chimneys on 05 June 2023. This was noted to be a big increase in numbers from last year. This is likely to be due to wet weather in 2022 causing the chimneys to be broken up. This is positive news for the Spiney Mason Wasp population on the main drain.



Examples of Spiny Mason Wasp chimneys in the old sand martin colony bank

9.0 SOUTH HOLLAND MAIN DRAIN – ECOLOGICAL SURVEYS

An ecological and botanical survey was undertaken by Helen Scarborough, Ecological Consultant, in July and August 2022 on the South Holland Main drain. A further update was also undertaken in June 2023.

During the updated botanical survey, common spotted orchid, southern marsh orchid, the hybrid of the two, and common twayblade were all noted. Twayblade has not been recorded on site previously. A photo of the Twayblade Orchid can be seen below.



Common Twayblade Orchid – June 2023

During an additional walkover survey by IDB Officers of the southern bank between the Wisbech Road and the otter site on 01 June 2023, two different orchid species were observed coming into bloom (Southern Marsh Orchid and Common Spotted Marsh Orchid).

Example photos of Southern Marsh Orchid and Common Spotted Marsh Orchid from the survey on 01 June 2023



10.0 EELS

Fish friendly pumps are due to be installed in Lords Pumping Station later this year to replace the old pumps dating from 1963. This work is being undertaken as part of a capital refurbishment project, 100% funded by Grant in Aid.

11.0 NON-NATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES

There have been reports of Non-Native Invasive plants on some of the drains in SHIDB.

- Japanese knotweed - two sites
- Giant Hogweed – one site
- Himalayan Balsam – one site

The Environment Team have previously been out to map the sites and are due to return this summer to further investigate the extent of the species. A management plan for control or eradication on IDB land will be compiled and issued. Other sites are not IDB owned. The IDB has a duty under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act not to spread these plants during their operations. Where IDB operations may be impeded by these plants in the future, landowners will be contacted. It is hoped that the IDB can work with landowners to control or eradicate these plants to prevent future spread or blockages to the drainage network.

The Holbeach and District Angling Club have reported sightings of Mitten Crabs in the South Holland Main Drain as far up as Bell's Bridge, approx. 10km from the nearest tidal waters.

12.0 PONDS

Ponds are a priority habitat within the Board's BAP document. It is recognised that the SHIDB have no pond ownership, therefore Board officers will consider assisting other landowners to manage their ponds.

As such, this autumn, the Board will be assisting with management works on Boatmere Creek, which is a large pond/ nature area near Gedney Drove End which is open to the public.

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