

**Aims:**

Help the pupils understand the impact of the invasive American Mink on our native wildlife.

**You will need:**

- Hall or outside space to run around in.

**Instructions:**

This is basically a tag game, where the children are water voles and are being chased by a number of predators.

1. Designate the following areas:
  - a. A river
  - b. A riverbank
  - c. Three Water Vole burrows (safe home bases) – two in the river and one on the bank
2. Round 1. Select a child to be the Fox (chaser). The fox can only walk on the riverbanks (cannot go into the river). The rest of the children are water voles and thus can go in the river and cannot be caught when in the river or in their burrows. Play!  
*You should find the fox only catches a handful of water voles.  
If the water voles are hanging around in the river for too long, remind them they must go onto the riverbank to eat!*
3. Round 2. Add in another native predator chaser– the Otter. The otter can go on the riverbanks and in the river but is too big to get inside a water vole burrow, so the burrows are still safe home bases.  
*You should find this time more water voles are caught, but a decent population remains when safe in their burrows.*
4. Round 3. This time add in the non-native Mink predator (or two mink) as chaser. The mink can go on the riverbanks, in the river and fit inside a water vole burrow, so there is no safe home base for the water voles this time.  
*You should see the water vole population being quickly devastated by the introduction of the mink.*

**Handy notes:**

Fox, otter, heron and stoat, are all native predators of water voles.

American mink are non-native/alien.

Juvenile and female mink are small enough to fit inside a water vole burrow.

As the two species have not evolved together the water vole has no defence mechanisms to escape the mink.

Water voles eat grass, rushes, sedges, roots, shoots, bulbs and bark.

Water vole populations have decreased by 94% due to predation by mink and habitat loss.

**Do more:**

Make water vole, otter and mink masks ([download templates](#)).

Get pupils to work in groups to make up and act out a short play about the arrival of mink and the impact on water voles.