

Wonderful Water Vole Facts



Sussex
Wildlife Trust



Water vole emerging from a burrow © D Green

1. Water voles have had one of the fastest declines of any native mammal and we have lost over 90% of populations in Sussex in the last 30 years.
2. Water voles can have 2 - 5 babies per litter and can breed 5 – 8 times a year ! How many water voles can one water vole potentially be parent to in one year?
3. Water voles eat over 200 different species of plant.
4. Reeds, horsetail and sedges are some of their favourite snacks.
5. Willow, hawthorn, rushes and crab apple tree bark are favourite winter nibbles!
6. They have been spotted as high as 2.5 metres up a tree! But they aren't very good climbers.
7. They have to eat 80% of their body weight (60 - 360g) a day to survive.
8. They dig with their teeth which are coated with hard orange enamel and are self sharpening!
9. Water voles try and avoid predators by jumping into water and kicking mud in their face.
10. The main threat to water voles today is that many of our natural wetlands have been drained, developed, fragmented and destroyed.

11. Water vole numbers naturally decrease by over 70% in winter.
12. The water vole in Wind in the Willows was called 'Ratty'. Water voles look similar to rats but they are in a different mammal family.
13. Water voles leave piles of vegetation or food stores by the edge of the water. They cut down pieces with their teeth which have a 45° at each end and are between 4 and 10cm long.
14. Occasionally water voles live to be 2-3 years old, but often they live for less than 1 year.
15. Water voles live nearly anywhere near water – ponds, streams, chalk streams, canals, reedbeds, rivers, lakes, marshes, fens, ditches, rush pasture etc.
16. Water voles are 'semi aquatic' but they are not very well adapted to living near water. They don't have webbed feet and can't swim underwater for long.
17. In tall vegetation, water voles create small aerial nests about the size of a football. Where tall vegetation isn't available, they live in complexes of burrows at the edge of water. Their burrows are around 4 cm wide and a 'squashed tennis ball' shape with entrances above and below water.
18. Water voles are territorial. Females in particular will fight each other for a territory as small as 30 metres of watercourse (average territory size is 150m).
19. Water voles make handy prey for lots of predators including mink, owls, pike, foxes, dogs, cats, hawks, otters and rats.
20. Baby water voles are born blind and hairless but are independent after 3 weeks!

To find out more about water voles go to www.sussexwildlifetrust.org.uk/discover/around-sussex/wetlands/wetland-species/water-vole. If you spot a water vole call 01273 494777

Water vole burrows (below)

