

Mink

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Mustela vison*

AKA: Feral Mink

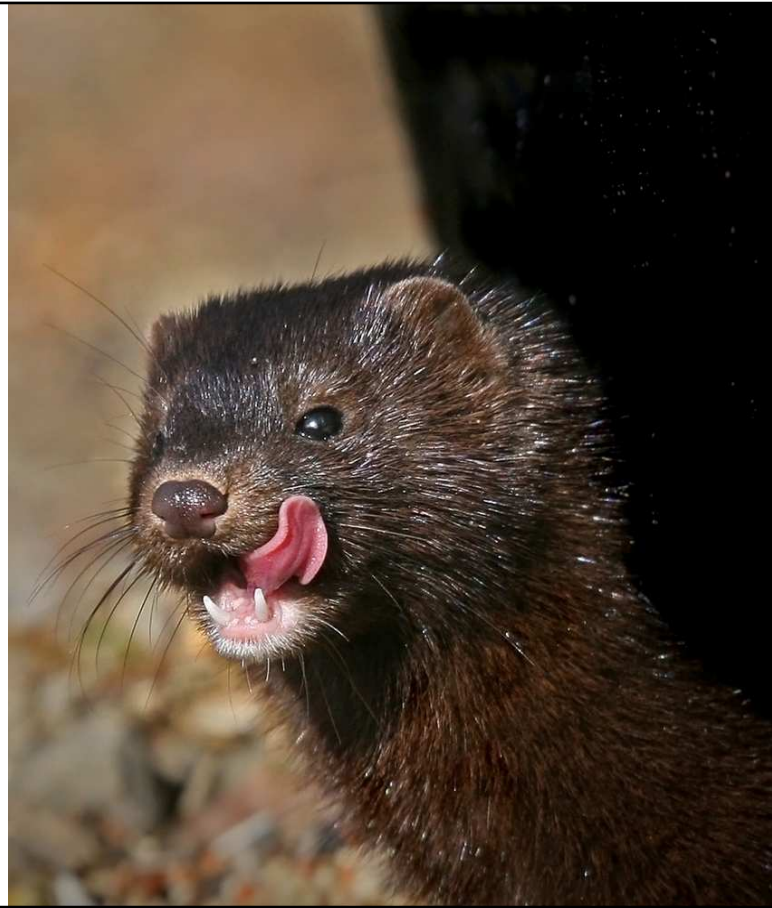
Native to: North America

Habitat: Aquatic habitats, including coastal, but mainly rivers and lakes

Established throughout Northern Ireland. Mostly nocturnal or active at dusk (but may be active at any time). Introduced for fur farming in the 1920s, with a peak in the 1960s. Established in the wild as a result of escapes and deliberate introductions.

The first documented escape of farm-bred mink occurred in 1961 when thirty mink escaped from a fur farm near Omagh, County Tyrone and became established in the surrounding countryside. *Mustela vison* have a significant impact on native wildlife, especially sea birds, domestic fowl and fish on which it predates.

American mink is listed under Schedule 9 to the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 as such, it is an offence to release or allow this species to escape into the wild.



Key ID features



Body length
30 - 47 cm

Glossy dark
brown/black fur

Usually has white patches on chin and throat (small amounts of white fur may be present on the upper lip)



Tail length 13 – 23
cm (about half
body length)



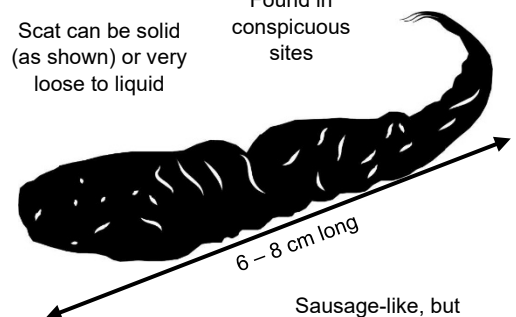
2.5 – 4 cm

Tracks may form paths leading to water, occasional signs of tail dragging in mud

Scat can be solid
(as shown) or very
loose to liquid

Found in
conspicuous
sites

Strong
pungent
odour



6 – 8 cm long

Usually contains fur,
pieces of one and feather

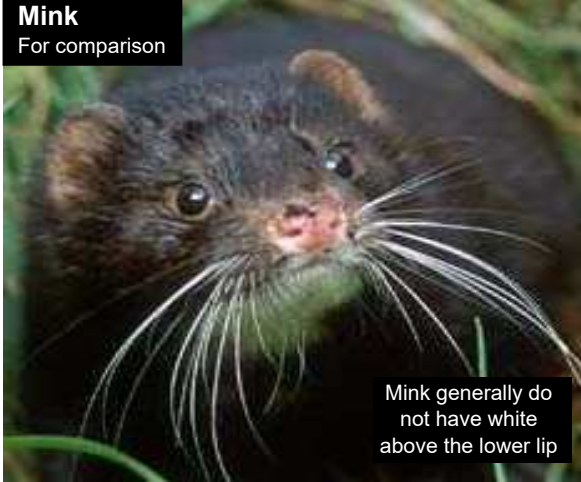
Sausage-like, but
twisted and drawn
out to a point

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Northern Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesni.co.uk/report-sighting>

Similar Species

Mink are very similar to polecats but can be distinguished by the white markings on their face. While ferrets are also similar size and shape, they are usually very different in colour. Note that polecats and ferrets may interbreed producing offspring with intermediate characteristics. The only other species that may be confused with mink is otter, however this is easily distinguished by its considerably larger size as well as through field signs such as tracks.

Mink
For comparison



Mink generally do not have white above the lower lip

Mink are elusive and field signs are therefore useful to aid identification, however these will not allow you to distinguish between mink and polecat

Tracks

Redrawn from Sargent and Morris (2003)

Note that mink and polecat prints are identical



Polecat



Mink



Otter

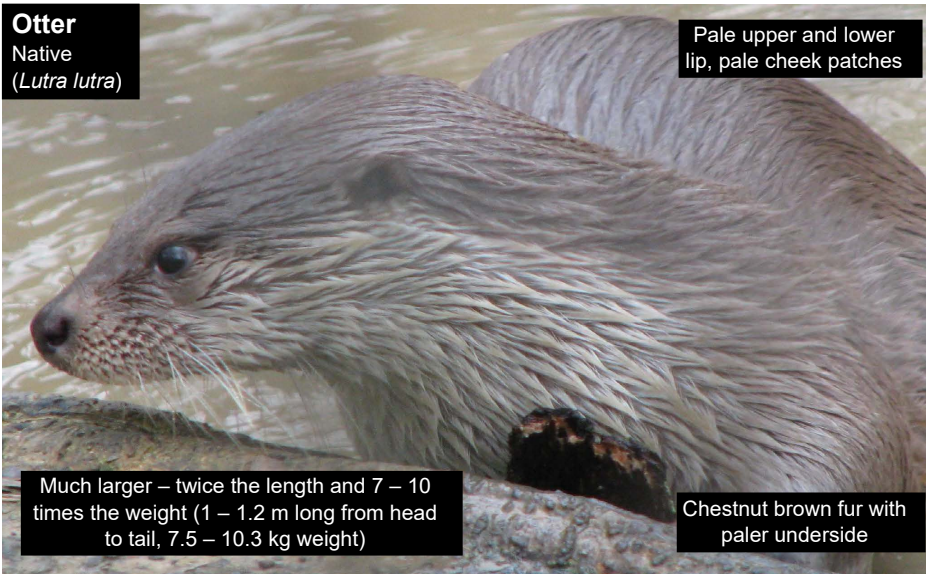
Polecat
Invasive non-native
(*Mustela putorius*)



White tips to ears

White above upper lip creates a mask

Otter
Native
(*Lutra lutra*)



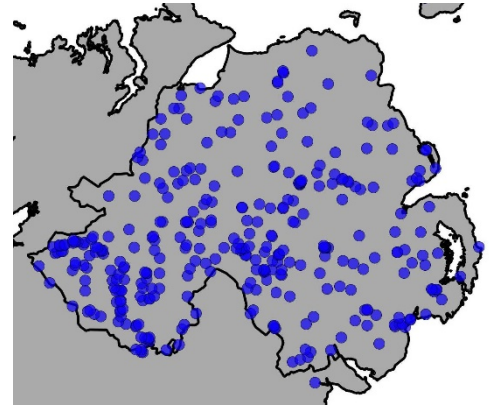
Pale upper and lower lip, pale cheek patches

Much larger – twice the length and 7 – 10 times the weight (1 – 1.2 m long from head to tail, 7.5 – 10.3 kg weight)

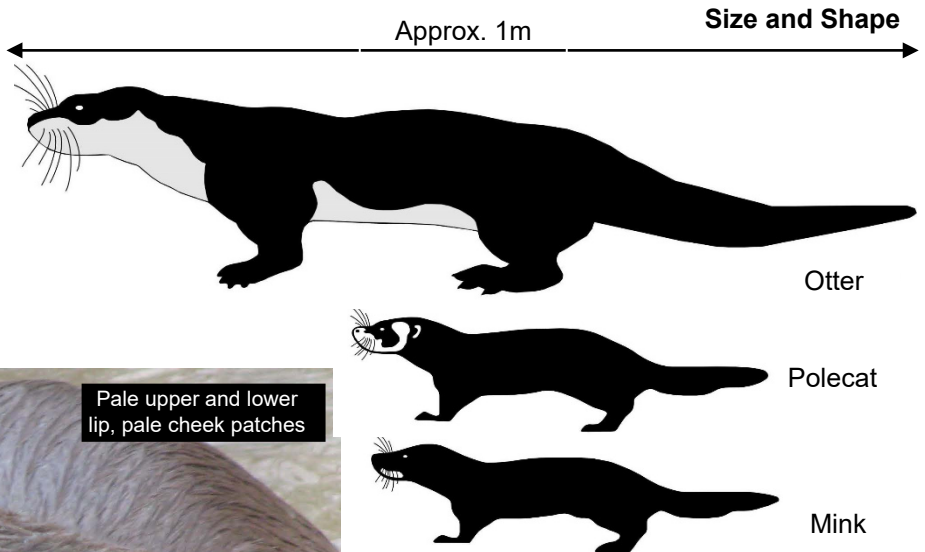
Chestnut brown fur with paler underside

Distribution

Widespread throughout Northern Ireland



Source: NBN atlas Northern Ireland - <https://northernireland-species.nbnatlas.org/species/NHMSYS0020774297>
Check website for current distribution



References and further reading:

Bang, P and Dahlstrom, P (2006) "Animal Tracks and Signs. OUP Pocket Guide Series". Oxford University Press
MacDonald, D (2005) "Collins Field Guide to the Mammals of Britain and Europe". Harper Collins
Sargent, G, and Morris, P, (2003). "How to find and identify mammals". The Mammal Society
Serry, P (2005) "Collins Complete British Animals". Harper Collins
Photos from: Johnny Birks, Olaf Booy, Rick Leche, Mary Frances Loggans, Martyn Nicholls, Les Willis.

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Adapted for Northern Ireland
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