

## Bank Vole

*Myodes glareolus*. Order: Rodentia

A small plump animal with characteristic blunt vole face and small round ears. The bank vole has chestnut brown fur, fading to grey on the belly. The tail is dark on top, paler below. The body is typically about 90mm long and the tail about  $\frac{2}{3}$ <sup>rd</sup> as long again, an adult vole weighs up to 40g. The male and female are alike, but young have greyer fur.

The squeaks of voles fighting can often be heard in the hedgerow. Bank vole burrow entrances may be seen in banks and grass areas, surrounded by circular grazed areas. Voles differ from mice in their blunt faces, less prominent ears and shorter tails. Compared to the field vole, the bank vole has neater, redder, fur, larger ears and a longer tail which is noticeably darker on the top.



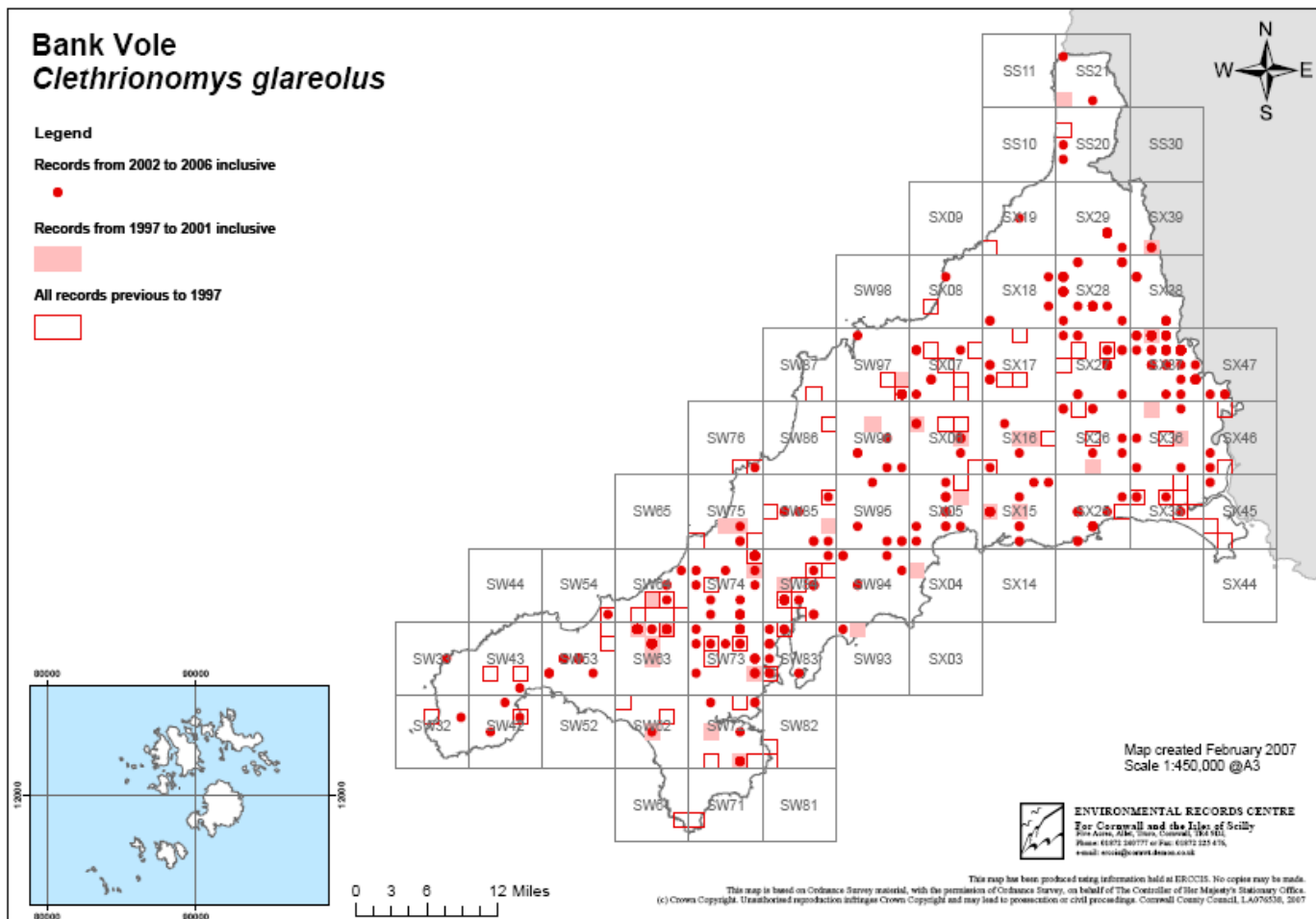
Photograph: Dave Chapman

Bank voles breed from April to October, although when conditions and food permits they can breed throughout the year and numbers can build rapidly to produce 'vole plagues' which occur on 3 – 5 year cycles and are associated with increased numbers of predators such as short eared owls. Voles build nests in tree roots, under fallen trees, or in short underground tunnels where the female raises 4 or 5 litters in a year, each of 3-5 young. The young are weaned at 3 weeks and sexually mature at 4.5 weeks. Ovulation in the female is induced by the presence of the male. Few voles live longer than 18 months (although they can live to 4.5 years in captivity) and populations rise and fall dramatically over the year.

Bank voles occur in a wide variety of habitats where sufficient dense shrub cover is available – typically deciduous woodland and along hedgerows and banks. Ranges may be up to 2 hectares, although typically they are much smaller.

Bank voles are mainly herbivores, eating a range of grasses, seeds, berries, nuts and fungi. They occasionally eat insects or bird's eggs and often climb trees and shrubs to forage. Voles may store food in their nests.

Bank voles are preyed upon by a wide range of larger animals – foxes, stoats, weasels, owls and raptors, crows and adders. Domestic cats kill large numbers. Vole populations may be affected by agricultural chemicals and by habitat fragmentation brought about by development, farming, road building and even through over grazing by deer. In plague years voles may cause considerable damage to grassland and crops and by stripping bark of saplings in plantations.



Local distribution and key sites  
The Bank Vole is widespread but under recorded across Cornwall.

**Number of records per date class**  
2002 to 2006 inclusive 480  
1997 to 2001 inclusive 38  
All records previous to 1997 125

Bank Voles are found from the Arctic Circle south to the Mediterranean

Bank Voles are widely distributed and common across Cornwall, they are not regarded to be of conservation concern, however their short lifespan and dramatically fluctuating population over the year may make them vulnerable to environmental or habitat change. The total vole population of the UK has been calculated to reach up to 100 million individuals.

#### Survey Methods

Small mammal trapping  
Cat kill records  
Owl pellet analysis  
Incidental sightings – bird feeders, mouse traps, live sightings  
Hazel nut surveys

#### Did you know?

Also known as the red backed vole or the red mouse, previously known as *Clethrionomys*, *Arvicola*, and *Euotomys glareolus*. The word Vole is derived from Norse, *Vollmus*, meaning field mouse (rather confusingly...) There are several sub-species of bank vole found on islands around the UK, including Skomer and Guernsey, which tend to be larger and paler.

#### Key references

Flowerdew, J.(1993) Mice and Voles. Whittet Books, London.