



27th October 2015

Tasha Hunter & Yvonne Kelleher
London Borough of Richmond upon Thames
Civic Centre,
44 York Street,
Twickenham,
Middlesex,
TW1 3BZ

Dear Tasha and Yvonne,

Duke of Northumberland adjacent to The Stoop – Pre-works Update Water Vole Survey Memo

Introduction

A water vole survey, carried out by FOA Ecology Ltd on 11th November 2014, had previously identified the presence of definitive water vole signs along the eastern bank of the Duke of Northumberland River adjacent to The Stoop. On 16th October 2015 the scheduled pre-works repeat water vole survey of the same stretch of river was undertaken by a 2 surveyor team (F Oliver and M Gelling). The objective of this repeat survey was to inform the imminent footpath upgrade works along this stretch of the river.

Methodology

The survey was timed to follow a period of dry weather to ensure water vole evidence would be present and discernible. It was also timed to be undertaken before water vole activity significantly reduces but after late summer / early autumn predation and natural mortality, i.e. to give a reliable and accurate picture of likely use of this stretch at the time of the start of the footpath works; it is understood that the footpath upgrade works are currently scheduled to commence in early November 2015.

This updated water vole survey was limited to recording direct positive evidence of water vole (i.e. droppings, latrines, feeding signs and / or burrows with direct water vole evidence) along the eastern bank.

Results

During the survey, definitive water vole signs were identified at 6 locations.

Three separate water vole latrines (i.e. piles of water vole droppings, some of which were 'padded' down / squashed) were identified, and all 3 of these locations were associated with excavation into / access behind the wooden revetments which may represent burrow systems,

FOA Ecology Ltd

london@foaecology.com



possibly pertaining to water vole.

In addition, scattered water vole droppings were found at 3 locations, with 2 of these locations being associated with excavation into / access behind the wooden revetments which may represent burrow systems, possibly pertaining to water vole. The third set of water vole droppings were identified on a floating piece of polystyrene.

These 6 definitive water vole signs are shown on the plan in Appendix 1.

In terms of survey limitations, it should be noted that certain sections of the eastern bank of this stretch of river are densely vegetated by bramble which prevents direct access to inspect the eastern bank. The main section of overhanging bramble occurs adjacent to the main 'pinch-point' in the route of the footpath where there is a bend in the footpath adjacent to the southern end of the western stand of The Stoop – this pinch point is depicted on the plan in Appendix 1.

The section of overhanging bramble adjacent to the pinch-point does include sections of animal excavation along the wooden revetments at least some of which are considered to represent mammal burrow systems. All features that were observed to be possible burrow systems were mapped during the initial November 2014 water vole survey and are shown in the plan in Appendix 2. However, these burrow systems are considered to be more characteristic of brown rat, rather than water vole. Nonetheless, due to presence of unidentified burrow systems (and that these burrow systems could not be directly inspected due to dense bramble), a precautionary approach to works at this pinch point is proposed.

Recommendations

As stated above, the footpath upgrade works are proposed to commence in early November 2015. Under Section 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take (capture) a water vole and/or intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any structure or place which water voles use for shelter or protection or disturb water voles while they are using such a place. As the proposed works have the potential to result in an offence or offences being committed in respect of water voles certain recommendations are proposed.

During site meetings with the LBRUT project team in early 2015, the proposed route, width and nature of the footpath upgrade were discussed and the following stipulations were agreed:

- Confirmed and / or probable water vole burrows (see the 6 possible water vole burrow locations shown in the plan in Appendix 1) will need to be retained and a buffer (of 5 m) within which works are not permitted applied – i.e. in these areas it may be necessary for the footpath to be re-routed to avoid this buffer;
- Direct ecological supervision of footpath works in those sections with confirmed and / or probable water vole burrows and / or within 5 m of such burrows (see the 6 possible water vole burrow locations shown in the plan in Appendix 1);
- The footpath would, where practicable, be set back as far from the edge of the river as

FOA Ecology Ltd

london@foaecology.com



possible and would not encroach, other than minimally, closer to the river than the existing extent of the compacted bare ground edge of the footpath;

- For those sections of the footpath where encroachment towards the river beyond the existing western extent of the compacted earth footpath is necessary, i.e. at the pinch-point created by the bend in the footpath opposite the southern end of the western stand of The Stoop (see the plan in Appendix 1), the works will be directly supervised by the project ecologist;
- At this pinch-point it is anticipated that removal of the bramble scrub and potentially backfill of the void between the footpath and the wooden revetment due to erosion may be required. Should such works be necessary, it is proposed that habitat manipulation in the form of strimming the bramble scrub back to bare ground be conducted several days in advance of works progressing in this section, as a means to persuade any rats (or potentially water voles - though unlikely) that may be present in the identified burrow system to vacate the affected burrows;
- The footpath upgrade works will start at the *northern* end of the footpath and progress in a southerly direction, to ensure that those sections where direct evidence of water vole has been identified, are affected whilst the weather is still relatively mild and certainly in advance of the main winter period;
- The footpath upgrade will be restricted to the build-up of the path from the existing ground level and will not involve excavation below the existing footpath surface;
- The working area and working width of the footpath upgrade will be restricted to the extent of the existing footpath.

Conclusions

Assuming that the above mitigation measures are formalised and fully implemented it is considered that any effects upon water vole will be reduced as far as reasonably practicable.

If, however, the proposed scope of the footpath upgrade works are expected to vary from the above, then it will be necessary to re-visit the proposed mitigation measures to ensure that these measures adequately protect water vole.

Sign-off

I trust that the above memo provides all the information that you require at this stage, however, please do email across to me any queries that you may have.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fleur Oliver', written in a cursive style.

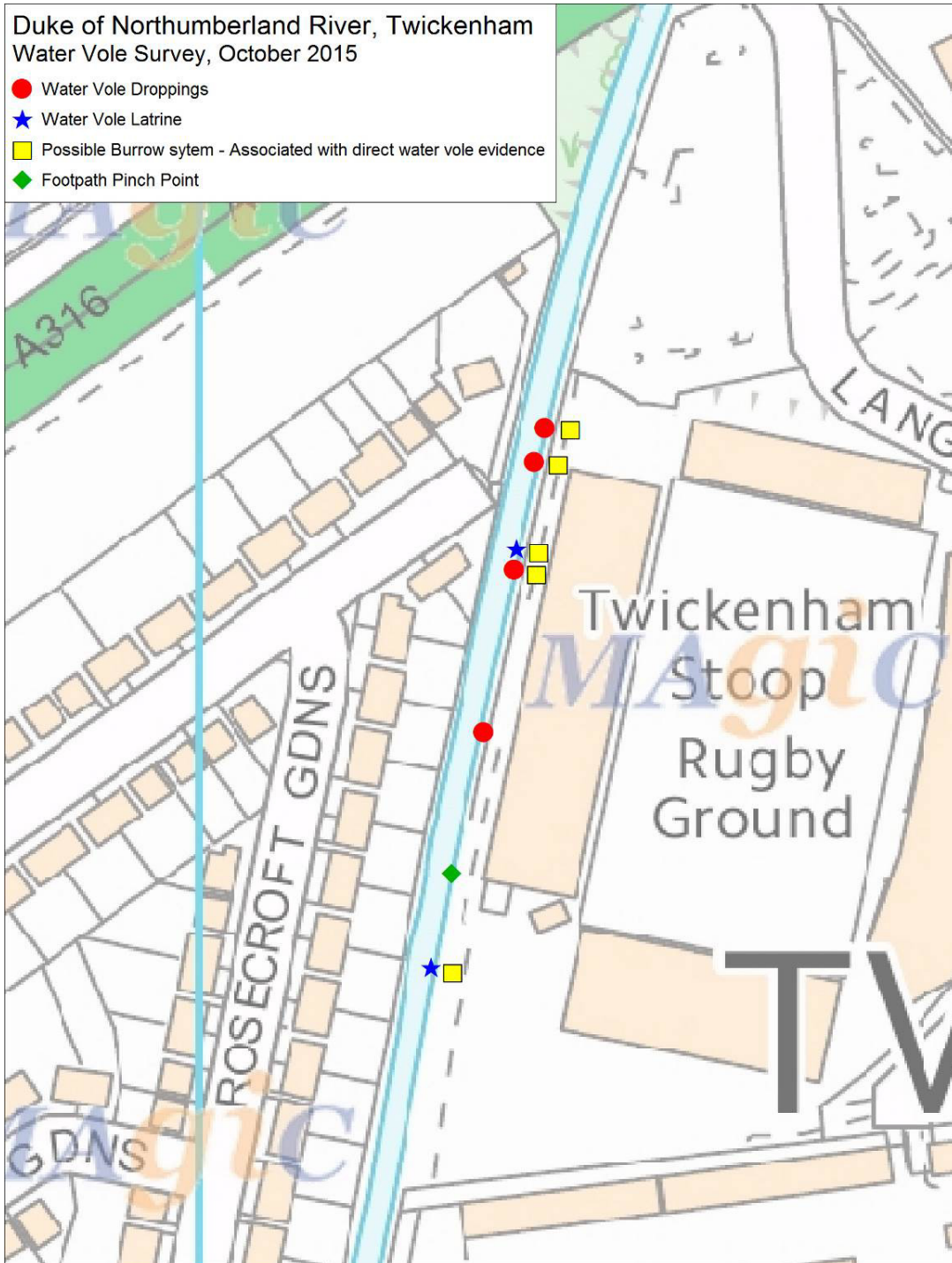
Fleur Oliver

FOA Ecology Ltd

london@foaecology.com



Appendix 1 – Water Vole Signs Plan – Oct 2015 Pre-work Survey



FOA Ecology Ltd

london@foaecology.com

Appendix 2 – Water vole Survey November 2014



FOA Ecology Ltd

london@foaecology.com