

AN ESTIMATION OF MINK *Mustela vison* POPULATION SIZE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR POPULATION CONTROL

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The American mink was first introduced to Iceland for fur-farming in 1931. Some individuals soon escaped from captivity and bred successfully in the wild. A feral population of mink had colonized most lowland areas by 1975. Already in 1939, the Icelandic authorities started a bounty scheme that paid for killed mink. Since 1958, reliable information on the number of mink killed annually has been available. The number of mink killed annually has been increasing rather steadily up to around 7,000 mink in the last few years, strongly suggesting that the population density of mink has been on the increase. However, no information on the population size or hunting pressure of mink has been available, from either Iceland or elsewhere. The aim of this study was to estimate the population size in the Snæfellsnes peninsula in W-Iceland, an area of 1.809 km², of which 1.043 km² are below 200 m, with the use of the capture-mark-recapture method. A total of 168 mink were live-trapped in autumn 2001 and 2002 and marked with micro-tags. Recaptures were by traditional mink hunting. The estimated population size in autumn 2001 was 694 (95% CI: 472-916) and 901 in autumn 2002 (95% CI: 543-1258). The average of both years was 797 (95% CI: 592-1003). Based on hunting statistics from the area, calculated minimum hunting pressure was 29% of the adult population in 2002 and 21% in 2003. The estimated hunting pressure is clearly insufficient to cause a reduction in the population size of mink in Iceland. Nevertheless, mink-hunting at the right time of year and at strategic locations probably is important for the conservation of certain bird species in the country.