

# American mink in Iceland. History, management and a way forward

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The American mink *Neovison vison* was introduced to Iceland in 1931 for fur farming. Animals soon escaped and occupied most lowland areas by 1975. Nevertheless, the population continued to grow for another 30 years. The species has had negative impact on bird populations, in particular species nesting in holes, on floating nests or in dense colonies on islands. There are indications of negative effects on freshwater fish, especially the arctic char. The American mink has been extensively hunted within a bounty system in Iceland since the late 1930's, with an annual cost of 535,000 EUR (1989-2016). The two main hunting methods are the use of trained dogs to find dens, where mink are flushed out and shot, and various death traps. Hunting is allowed all year. An experimental eradication project was carried out in two areas (1,300 and 3,900 km<sup>2</sup>) in 2007-2009. Total eradication was not accomplished but the populations were reduced by 34 and 49% respectively because of the increased hunting effort. The design of the eradication programme did not follow the IUCN guidelines for the prevention of biodiversity loss caused by alien invasive species, as politics outranked advice given by scientists. Control of mink has probably reduced the damage from mink predation, but does not seem to have severely affected the total population size, possibly due to the nature of bounty systems. Nevertheless, experience has shown that locally, high hunting intensity keeps mink density low. With changes to the hunting system, we believe it should yield better success.

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