



# American mink

(*Neovison vison*)

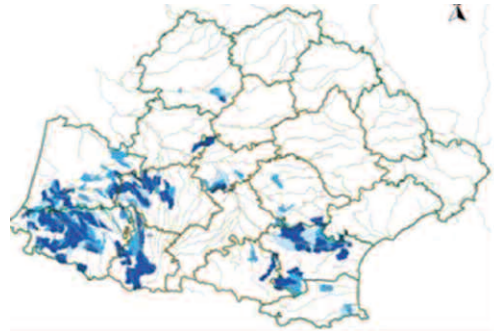
## Control programme for American mink in the Midi-Pyrénées region

### Midi-Pyrénées regional hunting federation

- The federation is a non-profit organisation, certified for environmental protection, with articles drafted in compliance with the applicable ministerial decree. It represents the departmental federations in the region and is in charge of coordinating regional and inter-departmental projects.
- It is a member of the technical committee in charge of reducing the pressure exerted by the American mink, in the framework of the 2007-2011 national plan to restore the European mink (*Mustela lutreola*).
- Manager of the control programme for American mink (*Neovison vison*) in the Midi-Pyrénées region, in a partnership with the hunting federations of the Hautes-Pyrénées and the Gers departments.
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### 2010-2013 control programme for American mink

- The programme was set up in response to the objectives of the second national plan to restore the European mink (2007-2011), namely to “reduce the competition with the American mink”.
- The control programme included five aspects:
  - project management;
  - purchase of equipment and development of skills;
  - organisation of trapping and verification of captures;
  - consolidation of knowledge on the American mink in the Midi-Pyrénées region;
  - information on the project.
- The objectives were to:
  - determine the distribution of the American mink in the Midi-Pyrénées region;
  - pursue and expand control work (reduce population numbers, limit the spread) on the American mink along the edges of the range of the European mink;
  - provide additional information for the report and the outlook of the national restoration plan for European mink.
- The project was run by the regional and departmental hunting federations, in a partnership with the trapper association of the Hautes-Pyrénées and Gers departments and the ONCFS regional office, with support from the EU and the Midi-Pyrénées regional environmental directorate.



1. Distribution of European mink in the Midi-Pyrénées region and the adjacent departments from 2007 to 2012.  
Map: FRC MP Anaïs Borrell, August 2012.

### Intervention site

- In 1999, three feral populations of American mink had been observed in France, including one located in several hydrographic sectors of the Adour River in Southwest France (Aquitaine and Midi-Pyrénées regions).
- In 2012, as part of the control programme for American mink, a study was conducted in the Midi-Pyrénées region and neighbouring departments to determine the distribution of the American mink population in Southwest France.
- The campaigns to capture American minks took place only in the Hautes-Pyrénées and Gers departments (the only ones taking part in the plan for European minks).

### Disturbances and issues involved

- The presence of American mink in the natural environment in France is the consequence of the animals regularly escaping from farms set up for the fur industry starting in 1926.
- The population in Southwestern France appeared in the 1980s, in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques and Hautes-Pyrénées departments. In the 1990s, this population spread to the Gers and Landes departments.
- In the Midi-Pyrénées region, the primary objective of the work to control American-mink populations is to preserve native species.
- In the competition with the European mink, the American mink has the upper hand:
  - the European mink is a protected species in Europe (Bern convention and listing in the Annexes II and IV of the

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 Map: FRC MP Anaïs Borrell, August 2012.

Habitats directive) and on the national level (interministerial decree dated 23 April 2007), and a species for which two national restoration plans have been set up (2000 to 2004 and 2007 to 2011);

- the native species occupies the same ecological niche as the American mink and its populations have regressed severely. However, the Hautes-Pyrénées and Gers departments are acknowledged as areas in which the European mink could stage a comeback.

■ The invasive species is a generalist and opportunistic predator of a wide range of prey, including:

- birds in contact with aquatic environments, amphibians, poultry, fish (impacts on fish farms), etc.;

- occasionally the Pyrenean desman (*Galemys pyrenaicus*), an insectivorous mammal endemic to the Pyrenees and for which a national action plan exists.

■ The species can transmit diseases to the native fauna and to humans (canine distemper, parvovirus, leptospirosis, etc.).

## Interventions

### ■ Study on the distribution of the American mink in the Midi-Pyrénées region

■ The national survey launched in 1999 by ONCFS and the data-collection work carried out in 2011 for the Atlas of mammals in the Midi-Pyrénées region noted the presence of an American-mink population in Southwestern France (Hautes-Pyrénées, Pyrénées-Atlantiques, Landes and Gers departments), but also mentioned a dozen observations of individual animals in the *Montagne Noire* area (Aude and Tarn departments).

■ In the framework of the control programme for American mink in the Midi-Pyrénées region, a regional survey was conducted in 2012 to update the available knowledge on colonisation by the species in Southwestern France and anticipate any possible spreading of the population.

■ The survey was conducted under the following conditions:

- collection of data spanning the period from July 2007 to June 2012;

- in the Midi-Pyrénées region and the adjacent departments;

- the recipients of the survey results included the 19 departmental hunting federations, the 8 departmental associations of certified trappers in the Midi-Pyrénées region (following information provided to the National union of certified trappers and to the existing regional unions), ONCFS local offices, naturalist groups (Nature Midi-Pyrénées, nature conservatories, etc.), the regional environmental directorate, the departmental territorial agencies, Onema, the regional nature parks, etc.;

- participants filled out two Excel tables sent via email. The first served to identify the respondent and the second contained the data on each observation (date, geographic coordinates, observation conditions and circumstances), any information on the possible presence of a litter, on the possible origins of the animal(s) and any information confirming the observation (photos, cadaver, etc.);

- where possible, on-site meetings with local stakeholders, essentially in the Hautes-Pyrénées and Gers departments.

### ■ Trapping campaigns

■ The campaigns to capture American minks took place in the Hautes-Pyrénées and Gers departments (the departments participating in the national restoration plan for European minks).



2. American mink.

3. 4. American minks captured in a cage trap.

- The work was done by a network of volunteer trappers who received:
  - cage traps (category-1 traps) free of cost from the departmental hunting federations. Use of this type of trap requires certification and a declaration in the town hall of each town where traps are set;
  - assistance from a federation technician who confirmed the type of species captured. Confirmation was mandatory for the 2011-2012 campaign in the Gers department, but not in the Hautes-Pyrénées department (according to the prefectural orders);
  - compensation for costs incurred for protocol compliance in the form of 20 euros for each American mink captured alive and confirmed by a technician.
- \* Each trapper filled out a sheet listing the captures.
- \* The captured minks were euthanised (shot).

## Results and assessment

### ■ Survey results

- The range of American mink in Southwestern France increased after the 1999 survey.
- The survey confirmed the existence of a fourth population in the eastern section of the Midi-Pyrénées region, in the *Montagne Noire* area.
- In the future, there is a risk that the various populations will merge in the Haute-Garonne department, coming together via the *Canal du Midi* and its tributaries.

### ■ Results of the trapping campaigns in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013

*Trapper activity during the 2011-2012 season.  
Source: Departmental hunting federations.*

Department	65	32
Total number of trappers in the department	350	282
Trappers that contacted the technician for confirmation	10	10
Trappers that captured at least one American mink	9	7

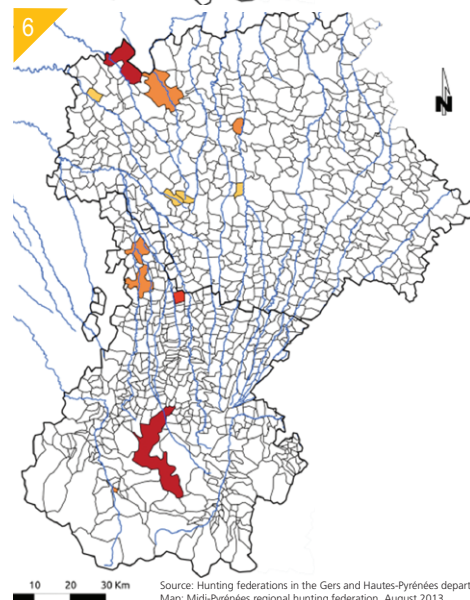
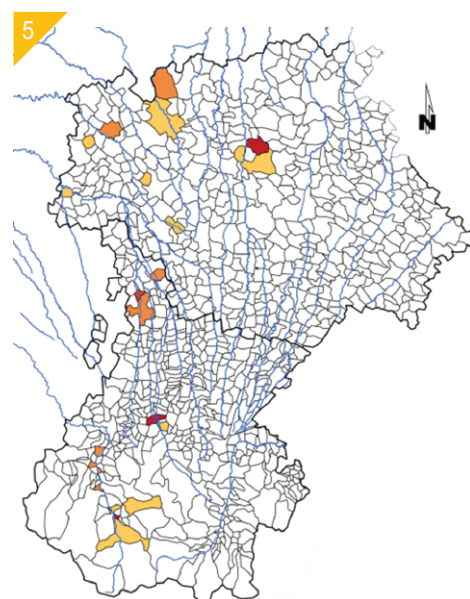
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*Captures during the 2011-2012 season.*

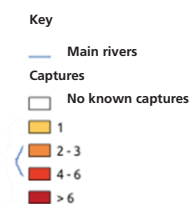
Department	65	32
Towns with confirmed captures	≈ 10	11
Checked captures	57	27
Confirmed American minks	54	19
Other species	3 skunks	8 skunks

### ■ Costs

- The results were achieved by a dozen trappers actively targeting the American mink (regular trapping in areas with confirmed presence of the species).
- The captures are not particularly representative of the actual presence of the species in the departments because trapping was often carried out in the same places throughout the year.
- The objectives in terms of the numbers of captures (based on the trapping declarations of the previous years) were not met:
  - Hautes-Pyrénées department: 150;
  - Gers department: 100.



Source: Hunting federations in the Gers and Hautes-Pyrénées departments. Map: Midi-Pyrénées regional hunting federation, August 2013.



5. Captures of American minks in the Gers and Hautes-Pyrénées departments. Season 2011-2012.

6. Season 2012-2013.

- It was difficult to motivate the trappers in the Gers department due to the modifications and uncertainties in trapping conditions between 2012 and 2013.
  - According to experienced trappers, there are areas (“sinks”) with heavy concentrations of American minks and others without any animals. No explanation has been provided for the moment.
- The total budget for the two campaigns (2011 to 2013) amounted to 44 849 euros.

## Information on the project

- The results of the trapping campaigns in the two departments were presented to the steering committee.
- A poster presenting the survey results was displayed during the naturalist symposium for the Midi-Pyrénées region, organised in February 2013 by the Nature Midi-Pyrénées association.
- The results of the trapping campaigns were presented during the Agricultural Fair in Tarbes in 2013.
- An article was published in the *Dépêche du Midi* newspaper (28 June 2013) on the trapping campaigns for American minks.
- The internet site of the Midi-Pyrénées regional hunting federation includes:
  - pages on the control programme for the American mink;
  - an article on the results of the survey conducted by the Midi-Pyrénées regional hunting federation in 2012 on “The situation with the American mink in the Midi-Pyrénées region”;
  - a fact sheet describing the species.

## Outlook

- The programme as currently organised may be abandoned given the spread of the species and the uncertainty surrounding the intentions of the national authorities concerning the future of the national restoration plan for the European mink and the control of the invasive American mink. The programme may simply provide information via the trapping training courses.
- An effort will be made to remobilise the network in the framework of the project to exchange traps in the Midi-Pyrénées region.

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### For more information

- The internet site of the Midi-Pyrénées regional hunting federation: <http://www.frc-midipyrenees.fr/>.
- Borrell, A. 2012. Statut et lutte contre une espèce exotique envahissante : le Vison d'Amérique (*Neovision vison*) en Midi-Pyrénées. Rapport de fin d'études pour l'obtention du diplôme d'Ingénieur de l'Institut Supérieur des Sciences Agronomiques, Agroalimentaires, Horticoles et du Paysage, Angers. 103 pp.

