



Orkney
**Native
Wildlife**
Project



A **guide** to identifying **stoats** in Orkney

(*Mustela erminea*)

Stoat facts

Non-native

Stoats are not native to Orkney and were first recorded in 2010. As an invasive species they pose a serious threat to Orkney's native wildlife.

How to identify a stoat

- Long body up to 32cm long (males slightly larger than females).
- Long tails (at least a third as long as the body), always with a black tip.
- Moves with a distinctive bounding gait, which looks much like a horse galloping, whereas a rat scurries.

Brown coat,
turns white
(ermine) or
partially white
in winter

Black tail tip,
stays black all
year round

White chest,
throat and
belly

Diet

Stoats are skilled predators.

- Mainly eat small mammals, like our Orkney vole, birds and eggs.
- Are skilled hunters capable of taking prey much bigger than themselves
- Are messy eaters and often store food but may not use it.

Stoats need to eat up to a third of their body weight daily - the equivalent of 41 fish and chip suppers for a human. For females feeding young it can be up to twice their weight.

Ecological impact

Orkney voles are a sub species found only in Orkney. They are easy prey for stoats.

Birds such as hen harriers and short-eared owls also rely on Orkney voles, particularly when feeding young. Their populations will be hit hard as they compete with stoats for food. Stoats are also a huge threat to Orkney's vulnerable ground-nesting birds including waders, curlew and seabirds.



Reproduction

Females are nearly always pregnant. Males enter nursery dens in early summer and mate with the female adult and young. Stoats can also postpone their pregnancy (known as delayed implantation) and give birth to a large litter of six to 12 young the following year.

Life-span

Up to five years, exceptionally six to eight.
Typically, one to two years.

Behaviour

Stoats are territorial and solitary. The exception is a few weeks in the Spring when females can be seen with their young. Males range further in Spring to find partners. Stoats are capable swimmers and have been recorded swimming up to three km in open water.

Habitat

Stoats occupy a wide range of habitats and have been recorded across most of Orkney Mainland.

Conservation status

Naturally, stoats have a wide distribution including North America, Europe and Asia. In Orkney, stoats are outside their natural range and are classed as an invasive non-native species.

Confusion Species

Rats

Stoats may be confused for rats because they are similar in size. Look for the stoat's black tip to their tail and the distinctive bounding gait.

Otters

Even young otters are much larger than stoats. While otters have light fur on their chest/belly it is not as pale as stoats and the demarcation is not as clear.

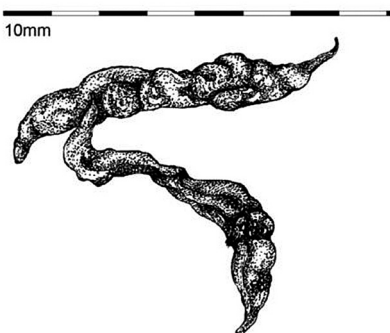
Weasels

There are no weasels in Orkney. They are also lightly smaller with shorter tails without the black tip.

Field Signs

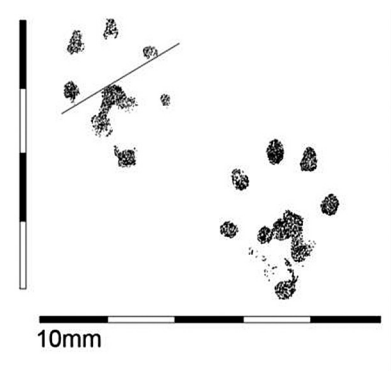
Scat

Stoat droppings appears thin and elongated. It is twisted and tapers at both ends. Deposited singly, it often contains fragments of bone or fur (sometimes insects), with a musky smell. They are often found in conspicuous positions to mark territory.



Footprints

Five toes per foot, claws non-retractable. Can be mistaken for rat but if a line from the first to fourth toe crosses in front of the footpad, as shown below in the top example, it is a stoat.



Spotted a stoat?

Stoats are a serious threat to Orkney's native wildlife.



All sightings are important to us. Please let us know as soon as you can if you think you have seen a stoat - dead or alive. Swiftly reporting the stoat sighting to us increases our chance of catching it.

We need the **date**, **time** and **precise location**. It is also useful to tell us any behaviour e.g. carrying prey, direction of travel and a location six-figure grid reference.

Report a sighting



www.orkneynativewildlife.org/report

Find us on Facebook:

 **OrkneyNativeWildlifeProject**

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Protecting our native species together:



The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) is a registered charity:
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