

Teaching Material on Biodiversity Conservation

Titel: European mink (*Mustela lutreola*)

Author: Chirine Herkommer

Quality Assessment: Prof. Dr. Carsten Hobohm, Department of Biology and Didactics, University of Flensburg

Level: secondary school (class 8)

Type of material: exercise sheet, information for the teacher

Aim: Acquiring information about the European mink (*Mustela lutreola*), threats, conservation measures

Process:

- divide the class into groups of 5 pupils
- online search with the help of the work sheets
- presentation of the results as a radio report

Notes for the teacher:

The results of the online search should be recorded on the work sheet. Based on this, each group should present their results to the class in a radio report. As many pupils as possible should be involved. For example, there could be a moderator, knowledge show host, one or more experts and a few citizens, who comment on the subject. The report can be recorded on a dictaphone or presented directly in front of the class. The latter is a lot more time-saving. If you want to work with a dictaphone, this could be combined into a project together with media lessons. This would provide more time and opportunity to review and improve the radio report. This is possible by writing stage directions, cutting audio recordings and, if appropriate, by setting to music and sound.

References:

European Centre for Nature Conservation (n.y.): European mink – *Mustela lutreola*. – Tilburg (<http://www.lhnet.org/european-mink/>; access on 12.01.2014).

Fournier, C. & Moutou, F. (2005): European mink (*Mustela lutreola*). – n.p. (<http://www.arkive.org/european-mink/mustela-lutreola/>; access on 12.01.2014).

IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (2013): *Mustela lutreola*. – n.p. (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/details/14018/0>; access on 07.01.2014).

Shalu, T. (2001): *Mustela lutreola*. – Michigan (http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/accounts/Mustela_lutreola/; access on 12.01.2014).

Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia (2013): European Mink. – n.p. (http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=European_mink&oldid=585331740; access on 12.01.2014).

Information for the teacher

The European mink (*Mustela lutreola*) is a predator (Carnivora) and belongs to the family of the martens (Mustelidae).

In many parts of Europe the mink has become extinct. In Germany, the last wild mink was seen in 1925. Populations still exist in eastern Europe (Romania, Russia, Belarus), in northern Spain and also in south France. The number of minks living in the wild is estimated to be less than a thousand.

In the IUCN Red List the European mink is ranked as “critically endangered”. The red list of the Federal Agency for Nature Conservation in Germany ranks the mink in the category 0 “extinct”.

The European mink is a solitary animal and is active at twilight or at night. During the day the animal retreats into its lair in the earth, clefts or in the root systems of trees.

Its food consists mostly of small rodents, fish and birds.

After the mating season in March to April the gestation period takes about 6 weeks. Usually 2 to 7 young are born.

One reason why the European mink is threatened is hunting for the brown fur that can be processed into mink fur coats. The mink fur is not as valuable as the fur of the American Mink (*Neovison vison*) but during the 1920s about 50,000 animals were caught per year in the Soviet Union, nevertheless.

Another problem for the mink is the fact that its habitat is being destroyed. Rivers, lakes and fen woods, have been destroyed or altered for the construction of cities, industry or farms. Especially in the 16th and 17th centuries there was extensive deforestation because much wood was needed in the wars to make weapons. Water pollution is an additional problem since the mink gets the majority of its food from lakes and rivers.

A further problem is that a large number of American minks escaped or were rescued from fur farms. These are bigger and more robust than their relatives from Europe. This meant that the European mink lost even more of its habitat to its bigger relatives. The American mink and the European mink belong to the same family (Mustelinae) but they cannot be crossbred.

Many animal rights activists have studied the reasons for the severe reduction in mink populations, and today there are many projects and organisations which aim to resettle the mink in Europe. They rear minks in wild-animal stations and return them to the wild. In order to be able to return them to the wild without major problems, the cages have to resemble natural conditions as closely as possible and are not open for visitors. In addition, new suitable habitat has to be created. This can be done, for example, by restoring rivers back to their original form.

A second measure would be to keep the American mink away from the reintroduction areas. The population of the American mink is growing constantly and can only be controlled with the help of hunters and snares.

Projects to protect animals are very expensive. This is why zoos and animal parks draw the attention of their visitors to the problems by handing out information sheets and collecting donations to finance such projects.