

Mustela lutreola (LINNAEUS, 1761)



F. Müller

As a result of its similar appearance, the European mink is often confused with the American mink *Mustela vison* introduced to Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. The basic distinguishing feature is a wide white area around the upper lip of the European mink, which is absent on the American mink, though, infrequently, small spots of white also occur on the upper lip of the American mink. Despite this similarity, the European mink is only distantly related to the American mink; its close appearance is the result of convergence to a semi-aquatic life-style. Its closest relatives are the European polecat *Mustela putorius* and Siberian weasel *Mustela sibirica*.

Distribution

Endemic to Europe. Historically widespread in continental Europe, from the Urals to northern Spain and from the Caucasus to central Finland. There are no historical data on the presence of European mink in Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Since the middle of the 19th century, the European mink has suffered from a serious decline: first because of habitat loss and later owing to competition with the American mink. To date fragmented remnant populations still exist in northern Spain, western France, Latvia, Estonia, Belarus, central regions of European Russia and the Danube delta in Romania. In 1981–1989 the European mink was introduced onto two islands in the Kuril Islands (Kunashir and Iturup) in the Russian Far East. The introduction has been reported to be unsuccessful.

European mink

AL	-	LT	Europinė audinė
BG	Блатна видра	LU	Europäeschen Nerz
CZ	Norek evropský	LV	Eiropas ūdele
DE	Europäischer Nerz	MK	-
DK	Flodilder	MT	-
EE	Naarits	NL	Nerts
ES	Visón europeo	NO	Europeisk mink
FI	Vesikko	PL	Norka europejska
FO	-	PT	Visão-europeu
FR	Vison d'Europe	RO	Nurcă; Noriță
GR	-	RU	Европейская норка
HR	Europska vidrica	SE	Flodiller
HU	Európai nyérc	SI	Vidrica
IR	-	SK	Norok európsky
IS	Vatnavesla; Evrópuminkur	TR	-
IT	Visone europeo	YU	Европска видрица

Geographic variation

Various subspecies have been described since the early 1900s. However, due to the continuous nature of the distribution, the variation in species seems to be of clinal nature and, thus, without any taxonomic value. The most distinctive population was in the Caucasus (probably now extinct).

Habitat

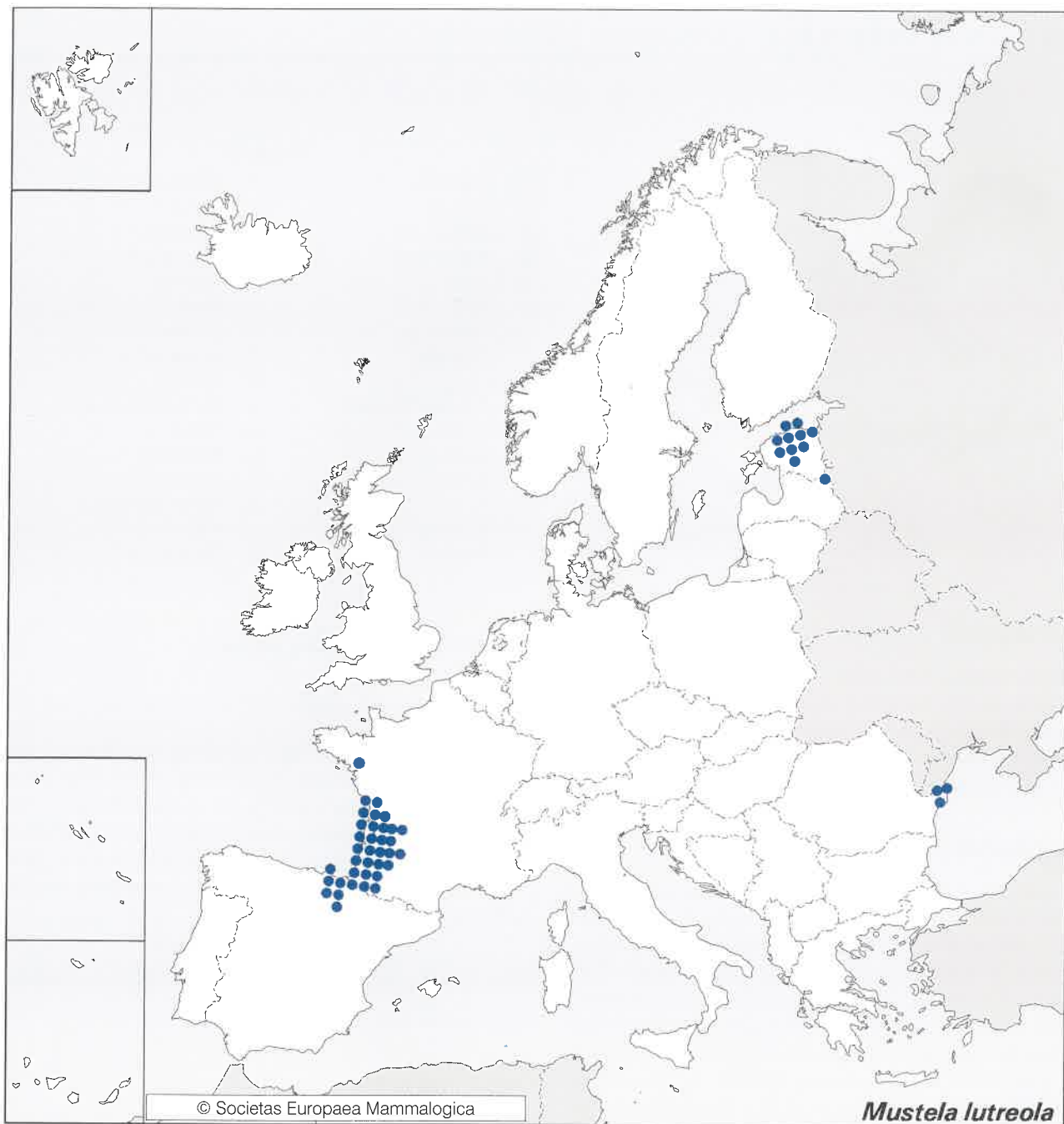
The European mink has specific habitat requirements. Being a semi-aquatic carnivore, it typically inhabits small rapid-current streams or rivers with lush riparian vegetation. It can seldom be found in marshes, lakes or larger rivers. There are no records of the European mink living on the sea coast.

Population status

Since the mid-19th century, the species has suffered from a major decline and has become extinct in most European countries. It is estimated that to date its range has dwindled to less than 20% of the original. The decline of the species continues at an accelerating rate.

International legal & conservation status

Bern Convention, Appendix II.
EU Habitats & Species Directive, Annex II & Annex IV.
IUCN Red List, Endangered.



Other information

A European Breeding Programme (EEP) for a self-sustaining captive population of the European mink was initiated by the European Mink Conservation and Breeding Committee (EMCC) in 1992. At the end of 1996, 64 specimens were kept in 10 zoos.

Literature

Heptner *et al.* (1967)
 Maran (1992, 1996)
 Maran & Henttonen (1995)

Novikov (1939)
 Shvarts & Vaisfeld (1993)
 Sidorovich *et al.* (1995)
 Stubbe (1993d) – review
 Youngman (1982)

T. Maran