



The mink is an effective predator and can take prey much larger than itself. Here a northern gannet. Photo: John W Andersson

NOT A NATIVE MAMMAL IN THE NORDIC REGION

The American mink (*Neovison vison*) has been present in the Nordic region since the mid-1920s, when it was brought here to be farmed for fur. The post-war expansion in the mink industry led to increasing numbers of minks escaping and a relatively rapid spread in the Nordic region. The American mink in the Nordic region descends from farmed minks, and is consequently not a native mammal in the fauna.

A THREAT TO BIODIVERSITY

The American mink is one of Europe's largest threats to biodiversity in archipelagic environments. In the Nordic countries, the bird species in the archipelagos have, for thousands of years, adapted to an environment without mammalian predators and therefore often nest on the ground. The mink can therefore cause a lot of damage to some bird populations – and at worst, completely eradicate some species.

MUSTELIDS WITH WHITE SPOT ON THE CHIN

The mink belongs to the family of mustelids and has a long and slim body with short legs. The color may vary, but is usually dark brown with a white spot on the chin. The total length of a male (including the tail) is between 45–75 cm, and of a female 45–65 cm. Males weigh 0.7–1.5 kg and females 0.5–0.8 kg.



The white spot is a typical feature of the mink. Photo: Kenneth Johansson



The mink is a shoreline animal and eats whatever it can find. Photo: Mostphotos

LIKE WATER AND EAT MOST THINGS

The mink is associated with water, both fresh and salty, which is why they are found by the coast, in the archipelago, by lakes and streams. On the menu are aquatic animals, such as fish, crayfish and frogs, and terrestrial animals, such as lizards, voles and birds. Each mink has its own territory which it defends against other minks. Males and females have their own territories. The size of the territory is 1.5–3 km of shoreline.

THE MINKS' YEAR

February–March is mating season and the males can travel a far distance to find females. A male can mate with several females. After mating, the males return to their territories. Some males will have died, usually in fights with other males, in which case a male can take the opportunity to change territory, if he finds an available and attractive area. In May–June, the female gives birth to 3–6 kits. She raises her offspring by herself. The kits develop quickly and soon follow with the female when she hunts. In July–August, the youngsters leave the female in search of their own territories.



Photo: Terje Kolaas

THE AIM OF THE FAMNA PROJECT

The aim of the project is to establish a large-scale, permanent, and cost-effective management system for American mink in the most vulnerable parts of the Botnia-Atlantica area.

The American mink poses a threat to biodiversity in general, and to ground-nesting birds in particular. There is a proposal to add the mink to the EU-list of invasive alien species, which will impose higher demands on authorities responsible for the management of mink.



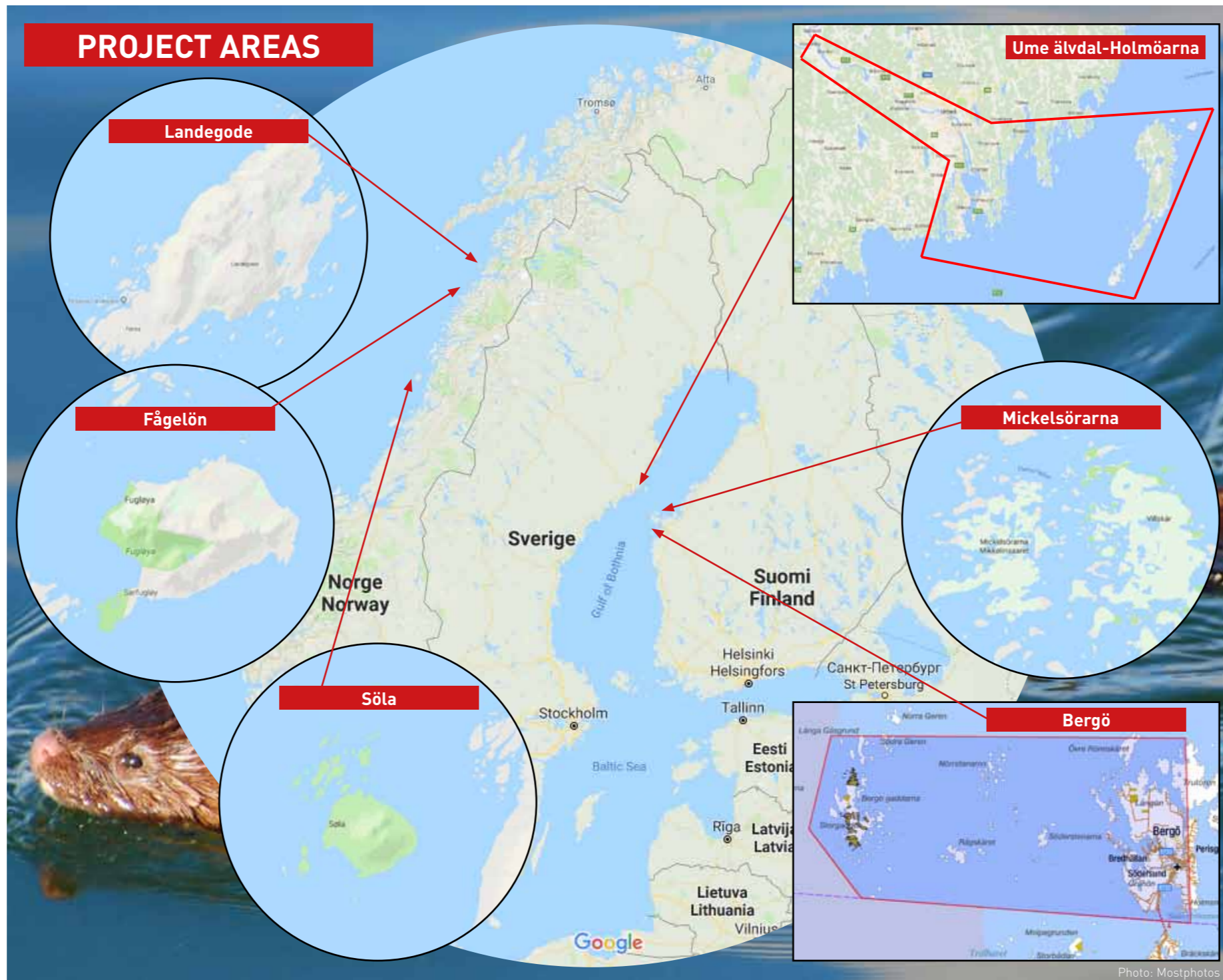
Photo: Kenneth Johansson

CATCHING MINK OVER LARGE AREAS

In practice, the FAMNA project is about catching mink with traps and with the assistance of local hunters. A large scale and continuity are the key to a successful management. If the work is restricted to small areas, new minks will spread into the area each year. If the intervention is interrupted after a few years, the highly reproductive minks will soon have recovered to their original number.

The American mink has a short lifespan and the population is fully regenerated in 3-4 years. The yearlings have a high natural rate of mortality and if the project on top of that succeeds in culling a significant part of the remaining yearlings, which are the most easily caught, over a number of years, it will limit the recruitment to a large extent, consequently decimating the mink population. To succeed, it will require continued trapping and hunting beyond the time-span of the project. The project will therefore also develop models for how this can be solved.

The impact of the project on biodiversity will primarily be measured through bird surveys in collaboration with Ume River Delta Fieldstation, Västerbotten Ornithological Society.



EUROPEAN UNION

Interreg Botnia-Atlantica

European Regional Development Fund

FAMNA, the management of American mink in the Botnia-Atlantica area, is a three-year nature conservation project within the framework of the EU-program Interreg Botnia-Atlantica, which finances cooperation projects between the regions of Östernbotten in Finland, Västerbotten and Västernorrland in Sweden, and Nordland in Norway. Through collaboration across national borders, the program contributes to increased capacity for innovation, strengthened business sector, developed natural and cultural heritages and improved communications in east-west direction.

Collaborators and co-financiers in FAMNA are the Swedish Association for Hunting and Wildlife Management, the County Administrative Board of Västerbotten, Metsähallitus, the Österbotten Association, the Kvarken Council, the Norwegian Environment Agency, the County Governor of Nordland and Nordland County Council. The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) is a scientific partner and Ume River Delta Fieldstation is responsible for bird surveys in Sweden.

<https://jagareforbundet.se/vilt/invasiva-frammande-arter/famna/>



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