

Plans to save the water vole

E YORKS: Farmers' scheme to protect animal

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ONE of the country's best-loved wild animals is being thrown a lifeline on an East Yorkshire farm thanks to a new project.

Britain's biggest farmer, the Co-op, has set up a team of Habitat Heroes to protect endangered water voles on its Goole farm.

Having linked up with Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, the farm has drawn up a survival plan for the creatures that inspired Ratty in children's book *Wind In The Willows*.

A survey of the farm's water-courses to map positive signs of water voles means farm work can be better managed to improve the animals' chances of survival.

Euan Fraser, farm manager, said: "I am very excited about the water vole project.

"Protecting the environment and wildlife on the land we farm is very important to the Co-op.

"As Britain's largest farmer we feel we have a responsibility to lead the way environmentally and I'm delighted our farm

is taking part in this important national initiative."

The Habitat Heroes project at five other **Co-op farms** across the country will also protect other threatened creatures, including otters, bats and red squirrels.

Tom Hayek, from the trust,

said: "The historic drainage activities in land around the farm has created a substantial network of drains and ditches that provide an ideal habitat for water voles.

"By establishing where the voles are concentrated through the surveys, we are working with the farm to manage the habitats and allow the population to thrive."

InShort

A project has been launched on an East Yorkshire farm to help a loveable water creature survive.

Habitat Heroes has been set up to help water voles.

Rapidly disappearing

GENERATIONS of children have grown up with the tale of Ratty and his friends in the classic *Wind In The Willows*.

But the furry mammal behind the character, the water vole, has been rapidly disappearing from East Riding rivers and streams.

One of the main reasons is their biggest predator, mink, which escaped into the wild from fur farms in the 1960s and 1970s.

Habitat Heroes is a project that is vital to their survival, and it is hoped that other farms will follow the Co-op's lead in protecting them.

Thanks to the mapping process, the farm is now able to stagger essential ditch management and clearance programmes.

That gives the water voles the opportunity to relocate before their homes are cleared, thereby improving their chance of survival.