



PREDATOR American mink
Trial of mink traps may go nationwide

BY **DANNY HALPIN**

A TRIAL aimed at eradicating American mink may be expanded nationwide.

Conservationists say the non-native mustelid must be eliminated because it preys on salmon, seabirds, moorhens and kingfishers.

A 96% drop in the water vole population is thought to be due to the predator.

For four years Waterlife Recovery Trust mink traps have walled off East Anglia in a trial. Boss Prof Tony Martin says traps could rid Britain of its 122,000 American mink in five years.

Of anyone baulking at killing the animals, he said: "They don't see mink chewing the heads off young kingfishers or going into a nest of water voles and eating all the young."

"Don't think that by not killing mink, you're not killing anything."



FOR SALE Signs of an uplift

House prices rise by £4.5k ..but sales up

BY **VICKY SHAW**

THE average asking price for a house jumped by £4,571 month-on-month so far in January, property website Rightmove found.

A property coming on the market has increased by 1.3% to £359,748.

But average prices are still 0.7% below January 2023, with 15% more properties going on sale and more sales being agreed.

The number of potential buyers contacting estate agents in the first week of 2024 was 5% higher than the same week last year.

Rightmove director Tim Bannister said: "The initial signs suggest a smoother year for movers in 2024."

The report came as lettings agent Hamptons said the average newly let private rent rose by 10.2% year on year in December to £1,340 per month.

ROCK OF AGE

Great gran Babs takes up drumming **age 90**

STICK IT TO 'EM
Babs McInnis rocks out on the drums



RHYTHM SECTION
Barbara with tutor Chris



BY **HOLLIE BONE**

A 90-year-old great-grandmother has rolled back the years to become one of Britain's oldest female drummers, thanks to a founder member of Simply Red.

Barbara McInnis says rocking out keeps her feeling young, with the help of tutor Chris Joyce, 66, who was in the group from 1985 to 1991.

The retired headteacher was not a fan of Simply Red when she first booked lessons six months ago.

But she has since been influenced by Chris – whose work features on

the band's hit singles Holding Back the Years and If You Don't Know Me By Now.

Widowed great-grandmother-of-10 Barbara said: "It's helped me roll back the years. It's given me a new lease of life,

a new interest, which I think is good at my age. It has brought genuine joy back into my life, and removed a few wrinkles.

"I was brought up on classical music. I was more interested in Messiah, and a

bit of Fauré, and choral society work. I wasn't really interested in pop stuff."

Barbara, from Morecambe, Lancs, took up drumming after dabbling with percussion instruments in her local ukulele band. Now her repertoire spans rock and pop classics from Chuck Berry to The Beatles.

Chris, from Manchester, said: "She's a great student. At her age, it's inspiring for me and it's inspiring for a lot of people that she's so enthusiastic and has so much energy."

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LEARNING Babs has a lesson with Chris



BAND DAYS Chris, left, in Simply Red

Sub-zero temperatures won't make me a snowflake

PERHAPS I should have listened to my late mother, or at least to Mrs R, the sage-in-residence.

"Be careful what you wish for!" would be their common words of advice.

Last Monday I sighed nostalgically for the winter days of childhood, with snow and ice I've only lately seen on Christmas cards. One week later, in line with much-derided female intuition, leaden clouds fill the sky. Paul the BBC weatherman predicts a serious cold spell. The mercury

PAUL ROUTLEDGE
LIFE GOES ON



could go down to at least minus 4 C, and we might get several inches (or centimetres, anyway) of the white stuff in the hills, which means round 'ere.

I don't know what all the fuss is about.

As a three-year-old, I lived through the winter of 1947 in an unheated terraced

house. In January 1963, I hitch-hiked every night from Nottingham to Wakefield and back to see my new daughter. And her mother, better known later as Mrs R.

That was the year that snow lay on the ground for many months, and my hair used to freeze every time I got out of a warm cab – my lifts were almost always from lorries – to stand hopefully at the next roundabout.

It would make a good comedy. Carry On Thumbing! Cold is good for you, say the

experts, perks up the body. And anything has to be better than the recent weeks of continuous rain that put a real dampener on spirits.

It was chilly but bright over the weekend. The real hit is coming later today and tomorrow.

We shall see. Meanwhile, let's dig out the heavy woollen sweater my kid sister knitted for me some time in the 20th century. Home-made, home-warm, I say.