

Vincent Wildlife News

Breaking News - pine marten found in Wales - first in 40 years.



© Edward Delaney

After many years of searching for the elusive pine marten in Wales, I am delighted to announce that last month we had a monumental breakthrough.

A pine marten road kill was reported on a roadside near Newtown, mid Wales, and to our amazement it was still there when we went to investigate. Scottish friends may be amused by our zealous reaction to such a find, but it is the first time since the 1970s that a pine marten body has been discovered in Wales. We are extremely grateful to Oliver Amy for reporting the body. More about this below....

Earlier this year, I was lucky enough to see my first bat pup when I was 'allowed' to go into a lesser horseshoe bat roost after the adult bats had emerged. In the world of wildlife conservation, they say there is nothing more exciting than seeing the creature close up and in its natural habitat.

I have to say I was on a high for some time after my close encounter and still have the image in my mind when I'm sitting at my desk back in the office - thanks Colin.

Over the summer there were fears that the poor weather might have had an adverse effect on our horseshoe bat colony numbers this year. However, our statistics show that at our roosts the long-term population trend is still upward.

The weather hasn't deterred Trust staff either from having an extremely busy summer. We now have five projects running and a new one starting in December in addition to our usual core programme of activities, which this year included an intensive ten-day bat tracking session in Devon. Staff and volunteers have worked extremely hard. The MISE project alone (managed by Jenny Macpherson) has carried out 30 survey days/workshops, contributing over 60 days of volunteer time, equivalent to a full-time person working for two months. Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the Trust's work this summer.

Natalie Buttriss, Chief Executive Officer

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Breaking News : Pine Marten Update

By Lizzie Croose, Projects Support Officer

In October, we were thrilled when a member of the public found a pine marten near Newtown in mid Wales. The pine marten had sadly been hit by a vehicle and had been moved to the side of the road to avoid further damage. As soon as it was reported to the Trust, Henry and Jenny collected the carcass, which was badly decomposed. Examination of the marten's teeth reveals that it is probably a young animal. This is encouraging as it suggests evidence of breeding in the area.

This is an extraordinarily significant record as it is the first unequivocal pine marten record in Wales since 2007 when a scat was found in the Rheidol Valley, and the first known carcass of a pine marten to be found in Wales since the 1970s!

News for pine marten newtown wales



Pine marten carcass in Powys first in Wales since 1971

BBC News - 13 hours ago

A dead pine marten has been found in Newtown, Powys, the first carcass reported in Wales since 1971. Experts say it provides important ...

Roadside carcass proves pine martins are not extinct in UK

The Independent - 13 hours ago

Fig1:
Screenshot of just one of the many Google results for 'Pine Marten Newtown, Wales'



Fig2: The Pine Marten Carcass



A tissue sample was DNA tested at Waterford Institute of Technology in Ireland. Results show that the pine marten was a male and of a British genetic haplotype.

The find is particularly timely given the start of the People and Pine Martens in Wales project, which will focus on progressing our understanding of the distribution and status of pine martens in Wales. Pine marten sightings continue to be reported to us from parts of Wales and England.

Most reliable sightings we have received this year have been centred upon Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire, the Brecon Beacons, North Yorkshire and Northumberland.

The cluster of recent sightings around the Rheidol Valley in west Wales is particularly encouraging, as this will be the focal point for fieldwork undertaken in the People and Pine Martens in Wales project.

Map1: Pine Marten Sightings in England and Wales in 2012

New Project : **People and Pine Martens in Wales**

By Lizzie Croose, Projects Support Officer

The People and Pine Martens in Wales project will develop understanding of the status and distribution of the pine marten, improve habitat and inform future conservation plans for the species in Wales. The project will include an awareness raising campaign which will comprise a full public and stakeholder survey to ascertain opinions on pine marten recovery.

Fieldwork will be undertaken at key sites in mid Wales to determine the presence of pine martens and infer valuable information about the population. Den boxes will be erected in suitable forests and an environmental assessment will be undertaken to investigate the factors that may be limiting pine marten recovery in Wales.



Fig3: Pine Marten

The Trust has received generous funding from The Co-operative to help progress its long-running pine marten conservation work in Wales.



We have recently appointed a project officer, David Bavin, to oversee the project. David has worked on pine marten research projects in Scotland and has most recently been a ranger at Aigas Field Centre where he was lucky enough to see pine martens on a regular basis! David joins us for two years.

Fig4: A Den Box

Pine Marten Expansion Zone Survey of Scotland

By Lizzie Croose, Projects Support Officer

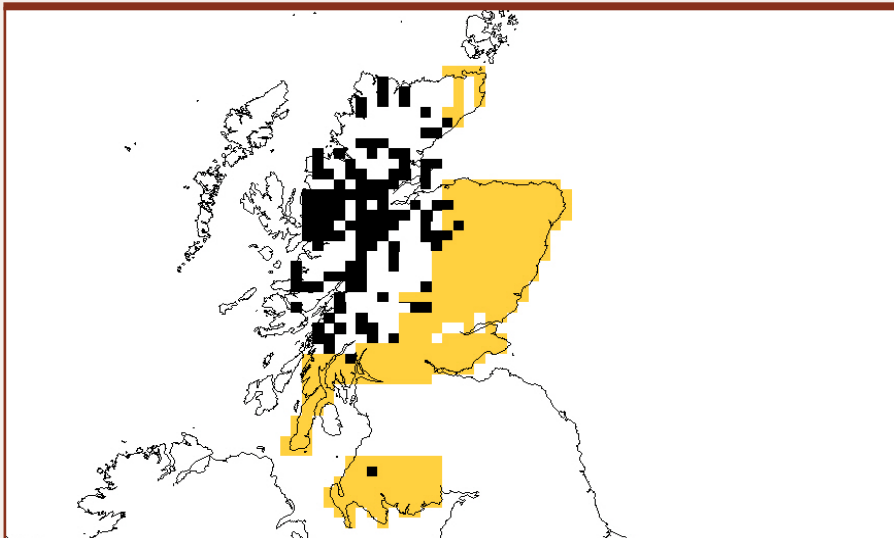
This year, VWT and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) formed a partnership to undertake a Pine Marten Expansion Zone Survey of Scotland. The pine marten became rare in Scotland during the 19th and early 20th century when deforestation and persecution resulted in the population retreating to the north-west Highlands.

In the second half of the 20th century, the pine marten's distributional range expanded

in Scotland, confirmed by two previous pine marten distribution surveys conducted by The Vincent Wildlife Trust (in 1980-82 and 1994).

Given the many years that have elapsed since these surveys, there was a dearth of reliable information on current patterns of distribution and abundance for pine marten in Scotland and a need to identify accurately the current limits to the species' range in Scotland.

To address this need, VWT and SNH undertook a targeted survey of a defined 'expansion zone'. This area was broadly defined as south and east, the 'core' pine marten Highland range as described in previous surveys (see map). This area consisted of just over 300 hectads (10km x 10km grid squares), covering parts of Caithness, Moray, Aberdeenshire, Angus, Fife, southern Argyll, Perthshire, Stirlingshire and the Trossachs, Fife and much of Galloway.



Map 2: The expansion zone targeted for survey

Recorded pine marten range pre-2000 (black squares) and the expansion zone survey area (yellow).

Survey Methodology

The survey approach involved surveying pre-selected 1km transects in woodland and collecting pine marten scats. A 1km transect, preferentially a forest track or footpath, was surveyed in every hectad.

Surveyors collected possible pine marten scats, as well as recording other key variables, including woodland habitat type

and structure and number of fox scats. Scats were sent to Waterford Institute of Technology for DNA analysis to confirm the species of each scat.

Fieldwork was carried out between May and August, as this is when pine marten scats are

Fig5: Pine Marten



most abundant (as demonstrated by previous research) and when the weather is (in theory) most favourable!

In addition to the field-based presence-absence survey, verified records of pine martens collected post-1999, including DNA-typed scats and hairs, photographs, roadkills and sightings, were gathered from organisations and from relevant research and conservation projects.



Fig6: Typical forest track used for surveying

Change in distribution

The pine marten has had an extensive range expansion over much of Scotland since the last systematic survey in 1994. Pine martens are now present in large parts of Aberdeenshire, Perthshire, Angus and have begun to spread into Fife. They have continued to spread through mid-Argyll and the Trossachs, into Stirlingshire and as far south as the Central Belt. In the far north-east, pine martens have recolonised much of Caithness.

The picture in Galloway is somewhat different. Although pine marten is known to be present in this area, marten scats were much less abundant than further north around their core range. The martens don't appear to have spread far from the Glentworth area, where a small number of animals were reintroduced by the Forestry Commission in the early 1980s.

Given the very small founder population, it is possible that the population has struggled to expand at the same rate as the main population further north and may even be restricted by genetic limitations. This is an area that would warrant further research.

Overall, this is great news for pine martens and it is encouraging that they are recolonising many parts of their former range, from where they have been absent in recent history. The pine marten remains Britain's second rarest carnivore, still absent across most of England and Wales, but their recovery in Scotland gives hope that populations of this enigmatic species can recover south of the Scottish border in the future.

Fig7: Pine Marten Scat



A full report on the survey will be published in February 2013, and will be available on the VWT and SNH websites. The Trust will continue to work with SNH to decide on the direction for future pine marten work in Scotland.

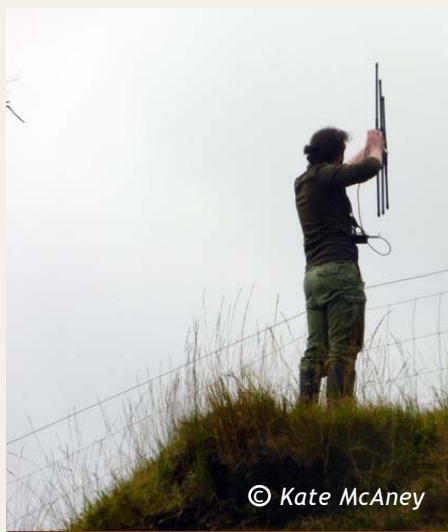
Successful release of pine marten kits in County Mayo

By Kate McAney, Mammal Development Manager, Ireland

If you go down to the woods north-east of the small town of Newport, County Mayo, you should not be surprised to find one or maybe two people standing on picnic tables or high rocks, each with an aerial in their hands. They will be some of the thirty or so volunteers who are radio tracking two pine martens that were rescued from the side of a road in early June and subsequently released near Newport.

We have an account of this on our Irish website but much more information is available on the website of the Irish Wildlife Rehabilitation Trust: (<http://iwrt.ie/pages/News-pinemarten-thanks.html#GO-RESCUE>), who arranged the rescue of the kits and is organising the tracking study.

The Trust was happy to lend the necessary equipment for radio tracking the two animals and I have been able to visit the woods to follow the martens on three occasions.



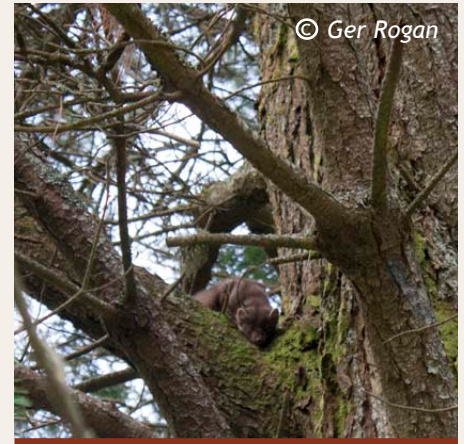
© Kate McAney

This is the first time that a post release survival study of the pine marten has been undertaken in Ireland and, as the animals have been roaming the woods since September 13th, when they made their 'escape' from their enclosure, it is probably safe to say at this stage that they have adapted well to their new home.

This consists primarily of conifer woods of varying ages and density, clear fell areas, scrub cover, open bog, and stretches of the Goulaun, Srahmore, Altaconey and Srahrevagh rivers. Before the pine martens took up residence, the area was known for its scenery and walking routes, because this is where the Nephin Beg Range of Mountains are located - although the maximum height is just in the region of 806m. However, walking, and therefore tracking, in this area can be difficult due to the hills and very wet ground.

The pine martens, known simply as PM1 and PM2, have, however, been tracked on most days since their release. On my first day's tracking, in the company of Laoise and Eddie, we were able to follow the movements of PM1, but heard nothing from the radio collar on PM2. PM1 was active in a small block of conifer wood not that far from the location of the enclosure. In the days before we went out, PM2 had been located some distance away, close to the

Fig. 9: Oisín Duffy radio tracking on October 18th



© Ger Rogan

Fig. 8: Pine Marten

junction of two of the rivers and, although we searched this area thoroughly, we didn't hear any signal from his radio collar. In the subsequent days PM1 remained active about 600m from the enclosure, but PM2 continued to evade detection and we all becoming a little concerned.

Finally, on September 23rd Ger Rogan made contact with PM2, not just by picking up the radio signals, but by actually seeing him up a tree, looking quite healthy! This marten has continued to give us the slip from time to time, but thanks to the dedication of the volunteers, he is always tracked down again.

Once the range of the two animals has stabilised, research on their behaviour will be conducted by two students from the Institute of Technology in Sligo, until such time as the batteries on the collars fail. It is hoped that by then the territories occupied by the two martens will be known so that baited traps can be set within these to allow recapture so that the collars can be removed.

New farms leaflet on the lesser horseshoe bat in Ireland

By Kate McAney, Mammal Development Manager, Ireland

Earlier this year the Trust was delighted to receive a grant from the Heritage Council in Ireland towards the publication of a leaflet on the lesser horseshoe bat for use by farmers in the west of the country, which is the distribution range for the species in Ireland.

Many horseshoe bat colonies occur within buildings associated with Irish farms and many horseshoe bats forage within or along habitats found on farms, yet there was no educational material highlighting these facts for distribution to farmers. Various organisations and individuals are responsible for

or involved with the conservation of this species in Ireland, including National Parks and Wildlife Service, The Vincent Wildlife Trust and the Heritage Council. The idea to write an educational leaflet aimed at farmers arose during regular meetings of these groups.

The leaflet provides a general description of the lesser horseshoe bat, including its typical roost sites, where it forages and how it flies within the landscape. Guidelines are provided to assist farmers who are in a position to provide the species with roosting places and feeding areas on their farms.

Fig10: The leaflet, which is now available to download in pdf format from The Trust's Irish and UK websites.

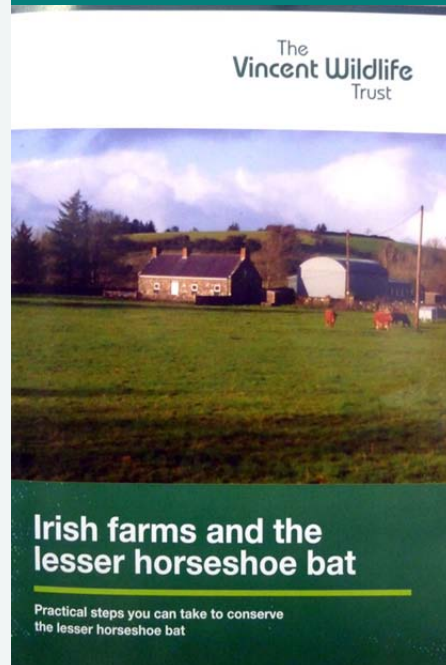


Fig.11: Kate McAney with Minister Jimmy Deenihan

“Preserving our built heritage is a central part of the Government’s Heritage Policy and in tandem with that is the preservation of our natural heritage which fits hand in glove with the work that The Vincent Wildlife Trust does to ensure that the habitats for these horseshoe bats remain undisturbed”

Minister Jimmy Deenihan (DAHG)

The final text reflects the comments made by a range of people who kindly reviewed draft copies, including farmers, farm advisors, conservation rangers, consultants, the Heritage Council’s Wildlife Officer, Teagasc’s Countryside Management Specialist and the Trust’s Communications Officer.

The leaflet was launched at the 2012 three-day National Ploughing Championships, the largest farming event in Ireland and also the largest outdoor farming event in Europe. During the course of the championships, a press release about the leaflet was issued by the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG) and Minister Jimmy Deenihan (DAHG) visited the Trust’s stand where he discussed the importance of the rural landscape for the lesser horseshoe bat and welcomed the publication of the leaflet.

An update on the four old ladies!

By Colin Morris, Nature Reserves Manager

I'd like to update you on the four grand old dames I mentioned in November 2010. In that article I was pleased to announce that four of the Bechstein's bats I'd ringed had reached the ten-year milestone.

In late August this year, I was delighted to find all four animals were still alive and well - at the age of 12. I have never given any of these bats a name as I don't want to get too attached to them (plus I've ringed over 600 animals), so I'll stick with the rather impersonal ring number to identify each individual.

Bat T7358, like the subsequent bats, was first ringed in August 2000, and rather surprisingly gave birth the following year: most Bechstein's give birth in their second or subsequent years. She had a year off in 2002 and gave birth to her second baby in 2003. Her 3rd, 4th, 5th,

6th and 7th babies were born in 2005, 2008, 2009, 2010 & 2011. She has been recaptured on 32 occasions and has had a total of seven babies.

Bat T7313, like the previous bat, gave birth in the following summer. There was no baby in 2002 and I did not find her in late 2003 so I was not able to tell if she had given birth that year. She did not have a baby in 2004, and the next confirmed (2nd) baby was born in 2005. She also gave birth every summer between 2006 and 2009, but since then has had no more babies. She's been recaptured on 34 occasions and has had a total of (at least) six babies.

Bat T7326 also gave birth in 2001, and had her second baby in 2005. She had 2006 'off', and her 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th babies were born between 2007 and 2010. She's been recaptured

on 31 occasions. At this stage I was beginning to think that bats over ten years old were perhaps too old to have another baby.

For no other reason than I've seen her on more occasions than any of the other bats, bat T7324 is my favourite. I've recaptured her on 38 occasions and I'm sure I can hear her sigh when I open the box. Clearly she was not in a rush to start breeding because she waited until her second year before giving birth. She has since had no fewer than nine babies, her last this summer (2012), dispelling my earlier thoughts that older females might not give birth.

Quite how much longer these grand old ladies can keep going will be very interesting to find out. I'm looking forward to meeting all four next year.



Fig. 12: Bechstein's Bat



Fig. 13: Ringing a Bechstein's Bat

The ecological impacts of artificial lighting on biodiversity

By James Baker, Research Assistant

This is a PhD study investigating if and how bats and their invertebrate prey are affected by artificial lighting. A side project will also investigate the effects of artificial lighting on amphibians. The study is being funded by DEFRA.

The study aims to uncover whether supposed light sensitive bat species are commuting and foraging in such a way as to avoid artificial lighting and whether or not the prey they are hunting is affected by artificial lighting. This relationship is very important to understand since many insects are attracted

Fig. 14: SM2 ready for deployment outside the grilled entrance to a hibernation site near Bath

to light sources and so horseshoe bats may have reduced food sources.

The PhD is being conducted by Julie Day at the University of Exeter under the supervision of Dr Fiona Mathews and Prof. Kevin Gaston. The Vincent Wildlife Trust is working in collaboration with the university since the project will be focusing on lesser and greater horseshoe bats, species for which the Trust has a wealth of knowledge.

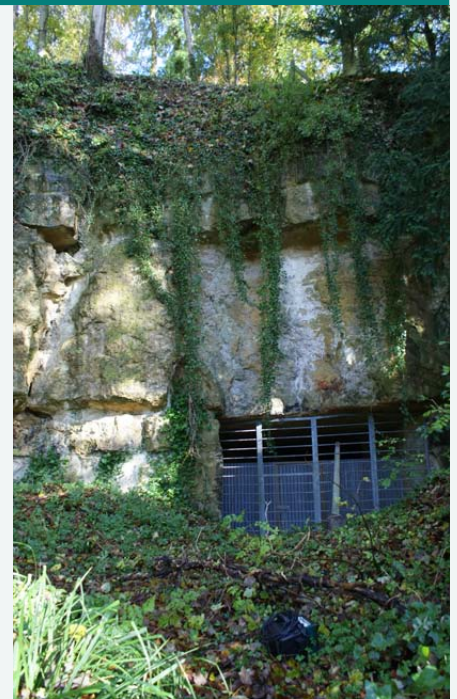


Fig. 15: James Baker deploying SM2 bat detector near a hibernation site

Fig. 16: Van full of SM2s!

The study has begun with measuring activity levels of lesser horseshoe bats around maternity sites during the summer and currently is looking at activity around hibernation sites. The summer work included sampling 400 locations at eight maternity sites

using a 2km radius for the roost. The winter work will consist of sampling 200 locations at eight hibernation sites. In the second year of the project greater horseshoe bat sites will be investigated in the same manner using a 5km radius.



Some good bats news despite wet summer

By David Jermyn, Reserves officer

Fig.17: Lesser horseshoe bat



© Frank Greenaway

Summer 2012 was the wettest in 100 years, with some parts of the country in June receiving a month's rain in a single day - weather more favourable for animals with webbed feet you might think.

Despite these soggy conditions, our lesser horseshoe bat colonies fared particularly well, with around 60% of the roosts we manage throughout Wales and The Marches having record emergence counts.

A couple of highlights: our premier roost in the upper Usk Valley notched up a huge 936 bats in residence and another roost in Monmouthshire had its best count since 2000.

However, the affects of the dreadful weather this past summer may have resulted in poor birth rates along with poor juvenile survival rates within the lesser horseshoe bat colonies. These affects may only become apparent in several years time if the size of the lesser horseshoe bat colonies shows signs of decline. Only time will tell!

Our Beacon for Bats Project receives funding from Environment Agency Wales

By Jane Sedgeley, Our Beacon for Bats project officer

We are pleased to announce Environmental Agency Wales is supporting the Our Beacon for Bats project by providing funding of £15,000 for hedgerow and tree planting to enhance habitats for lesser horseshoe bats and a range of other wildlife.

The proposed tree planting of native species such as alder, black poplar and willow along the river valleys will also create much needed riparian shading of the watercourses. This in turn will ensure Climate Change Resilience of the River Usk and its tributaries, benefiting Atlantic salmon, sea trout and species such as otters alongside connecting the habitat for bats.

Fig.18: EAW Logo



“This is putting joined-up thinking into practice. Environmental Agency Wales is very keen to support the Our Beacon for Bats project as it will encourage landowners in the Usk valley project area to adopt more environmentally friendly land management practices that will help manage soil run-off and diffuse pollution to protect water bodies”.

Rob Strachan, Biodiversity Technical Specialist for the EAW.

MISE Coastal Otter Survey

Jenny Macpherson, MISE Project Officer



Mamaliaid mewn
Amgylchedd Cynaliadwy
Mammals in a Sustainable
Environment

About 25 people attended this year's Coastal Otter Survey and surveyed the same sites as last year, collecting spraint.

We identified 11 individuals from DNA using these sites last year, so hopefully this year's re-survey will give us information on whether the same animals are still present, and if some of those were juveniles who will have dispersed elsewhere by now. We are also hoping for a higher success rate for genotyping than last year (18%). The results of last year's survey are shown below.



Fig17: Volunteers participating in the Coastal Otter Survey

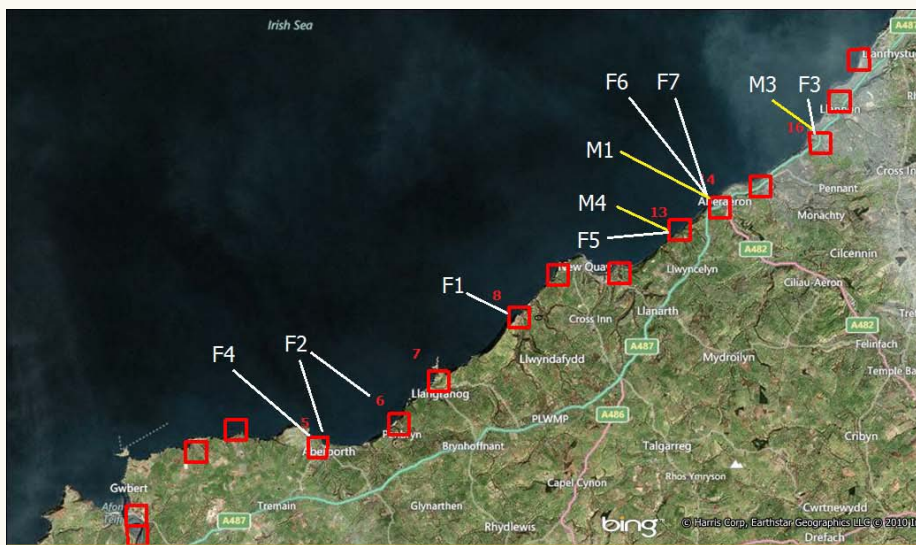


Fig18: Map showing the results of 2011 Coastal Otter Survey

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