

The
Vincent Wildlife
Trust

National Polecat Survey

2014 - 2015



About the polecat

The polecat is a native British mammal and a member of the mustelid (weasel) family, which includes otters, stoats and weasels. Polecats are generally dark in colour with a striking mask-like pattern of dark and light fur on the face.

The polecat is closely related to the ferret and escaped or feral ferrets may breed with wild polecats to produce wild polecat-ferret hybrids, which are generally paler in appearance than polecats. Polecats are mainly nocturnal and solitary and the most common evidence of their presence is as road casualties.

Aim of the survey

As a result of persecution the polecat population suffered a severe decline historically. By the early 20th century polecats had become confined to mid-Wales. The population slowly recovered during the 20th century and polecats are now widely distributed in Wales and central England, with outlier populations in northern England and Scotland. The current polecat survey follows on from two previous surveys by The Vincent Wildlife Trust in the 1990s and early 2000s.

The survey aims to:

- Gather up-to-date information on the current distribution of polecats in Britain
- Develop understanding of the extent of hybridisation between polecats and polecat-ferrets.

If you see a polecat or feral ferret, please send us:

- Grid reference and name of the nearest settlement
- Date
- Photographs: ideally one of the full body, including the paws, and a close-up photo of the face. This helps us to identify the animal.
- If it is not possible to take a photo, record the coat colour of the animal (eg polecat-like, sandy, silver, albino).

If you have collected a carcass, please keep it in a freezer and we will arrange for a postage box to be sent to you free of charge.

Please email record details to enquiries@vwt.org.uk or phone **01531 636441**.

Identifying polecats and ferrets

Some polecats, ferrets and their hybrids (called polecat-ferrets) can be identified based on key distinguishing characteristics. Polecats and ferrets vary in coloration and display seasonal variations. Any animal with a mixture of polecat and ferret characteristics is usually, but not always, by definition a hybrid.

Polecat pelage characters

Pale cheek patches and possible frontal band contrast with dark facial mask

No throat patch or less than 50mm in length



Dark fur on face extends to nose

No scattered white guard hairs over body

Dark fur on paws

Polecat-ferret pelage characters

Pale cheek patches and frontal band often very extensive and contrast poorly with darker facial mask, which may be absent

Throat patch 50mm or more in length

One or more white paws



Dark fur on face does not reach nose

Scattered white guard hairs over body, especially on hindquarters and tail