

THE VINCENT WILDLIFE TRUST

# **Annual Review 2016**



# Welcome



## Natalie Buttriss, CEO

It is often remarked to me how much the VWT achieves with a staff of some 15 people and, I have to say, I agree! Our staff, trustees and volunteers are outstanding in their breadth of skills and knowledge and totally committed to achieving the best results in the UK, Republic of Ireland and increasingly in mainland Europe. As mentioned in last year's report, we were delighted to receive the long-term support of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation at the beginning of the year. The two Programme Managers funded by this support (Anita Glover and Steve Carter) have made an excellent start in consolidating and developing our two key specialist areas of mustelids and bats; the fruits of which will begin to be seen in 2017 onwards. Our ambitions and ideas continue to grow, as well as demand for our specialist expertise and no-nonsense, quality approach to practical mammal conservation solutions.



## Tom Tew, Chairman

This is the last Chairman's summary I shall write for the VWT, as I step down at the end of 2017. I first came into contact with the Trust in the 1990s when the late great Vincent Weir invited me to talk to him about the future of mammal conservation in the UK. I was working for the Joint Nature Conservation Committee as their senior mammal ecologist but, in truth, I was naïve, idealistic and inexperienced. Despite this we got along famously as a pair of courteous introverts, sipping tea in Whitehall Court, and I ended up getting roped in. The 20 years of my association with the VWT, the last 10 as Chair, have been an absolute privilege, in large part because of the fantastic people that the Trust attracts. Mainly though, I confess, the delight comes from stroking an unconscious pine marten, or peering at a hundred roosting horseshoe bats, or listening to an enthusiastic PhD student – these are all, to me, deeply moving experiences. I am very proud that our small organisation has been able to do so much for so many of the mammals of Britain and Ireland.

# Overview of 2016



The Trust's activities in 2016 generated direct public benefit through volunteer involvement, education and advocacy, and profile and publicity. The figures that follow show a significant increase in activity from last year, and in some cases, have more than doubled.

## Volunteer involvement

The majority of volunteering related to the VWT's Pine Marten Recovery Project, with opportunities for volunteers to help with catching, radio-tracking and

monitoring the pine martens. Volunteers also helped the Trust with polecat fieldwork, bat counts, reserve maintenance and research. The Trust provided 11 training opportunities for volunteers and members of the public.

This year we had the help of

**388** volunteers

who spent

**6,426** hours

volunteering. This equates to

**£40,162**

\* Volunteer value is calculated on an 8 hour day at a standard rate of £50 per day.





## Education and advocacy



Our educational work this year included:

**1,854** Responses to enquiries from the public

**70** Talks and walks

**10** New educational resources

**8** Events organised

The Trust's educational work took on many forms: from dealing with public enquiries to providing information and carrying out more formalised learning, including field days for both professional ecologists and keen amateur naturalists.

In Ireland, with support from the Irish Environmental Network, a major public event was staged called 'Go Wild in Galway'. This was in conjunction with BirdWatch Ireland, the Irish Whale and Dolphin Group, Galway Bat Group and the Irish Wildlife Trust.



**PHOTO** VWT's Ruth Hanniffy talking about pine martens.

## Profile and publicity

Our Ireland website continued to be our most visited site, with more than twice as many visitors as our UK and pine marten sites this year. The Trust received the highest level of media coverage to date, with news stories broadcast on BBC TV and radio programmes, and articles appeared in both national and local publications. The VWT's social media presence has grown to seven channels with top posts reaching more than 600,000 people. The Trust has increased the production of video, including a short film based on the Pine Marten Recovery Project, and blog content to further engage online audiences.

In 2016, we had a total of:

**91,000** Website visits

**13,236** Social media followers

**86** Items of media coverage

**28** Publications produced



**PHOTO** Pine Marten Project Manager, Jenny MacPherson, being interviewed by Tom Heap for the BBC's Countryfile.



# Our work with mustelids

## Pine martens

Intensive monitoring of the first tranche of pine martens released into mid-Wales in 2015, as part of the Pine Marten Recovery Project, revealed that at least six kits were born to four of the translocated females in the spring. Continuous radio-tracking of a further 19 martens, translocated from Scotland in the Autumn of 2016, showed that the majority had settled into woodlands around the release area and there were no recorded mortalities in this period.

In September, a new PhD student, Keziah Hobson, joined two other VWT-supported PhD students working on pine martens. Keziah will be assessing the economic and conservation impacts of the pine marten on grey squirrels and forest land management.

An agreement was signed with Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust that formalised our role as partners and advisors to the feasibility study for the reintroduction of pine martens to the Forest of Dean.



In Ireland, significant progress was made in devising a predator-proof pheasant pen working with the Kilcormac Gun Club. Remote cameras were used to demonstrate the effectiveness of preventing foxes and pine martens from gaining entry to the pen during the critical period from June to September; no pheasants were lost to predation. This system is now being advocated for use by other clubs.

The Trust participated in a Pine Marten Population Assessment, which updated national abundance data for the species in the Republic of Ireland.

In partnership with Newry, Mourne and Down District Council and Ring of Gullion Landscape Partnership, the Trust co-organised the 2nd All Ireland Pine Marten Symposium in Armagh.



**PHOTOS** (Left) A translocated pine marten in a release pen © Nick Upton. (Right) Organisers and speakers of the Pine Marten Symposium.

## Polecats

The results of a third ten-yearly national distribution survey of polecats in Britain were published, demonstrating a considerable expansion in range in south-west England and East Anglia.

**MAP** Distribution of the polecat in 2015 (showing verified records of true polecats collected during the 2014-2015 survey).



**PHOTOS** (Left) Katie Sainsbury taking whisker samples from a polecat © Lizzie Croose (Above) Polecat photo sent to us by Nikki Charlton during the national distribution survey.

The survey provided nearly 300 carcasses, many of which were dissected by the Trust's first Vincent Weir bursary awarded PhD student, Katie Sainsbury, who is investigating anthropogenic hazards to polecats.

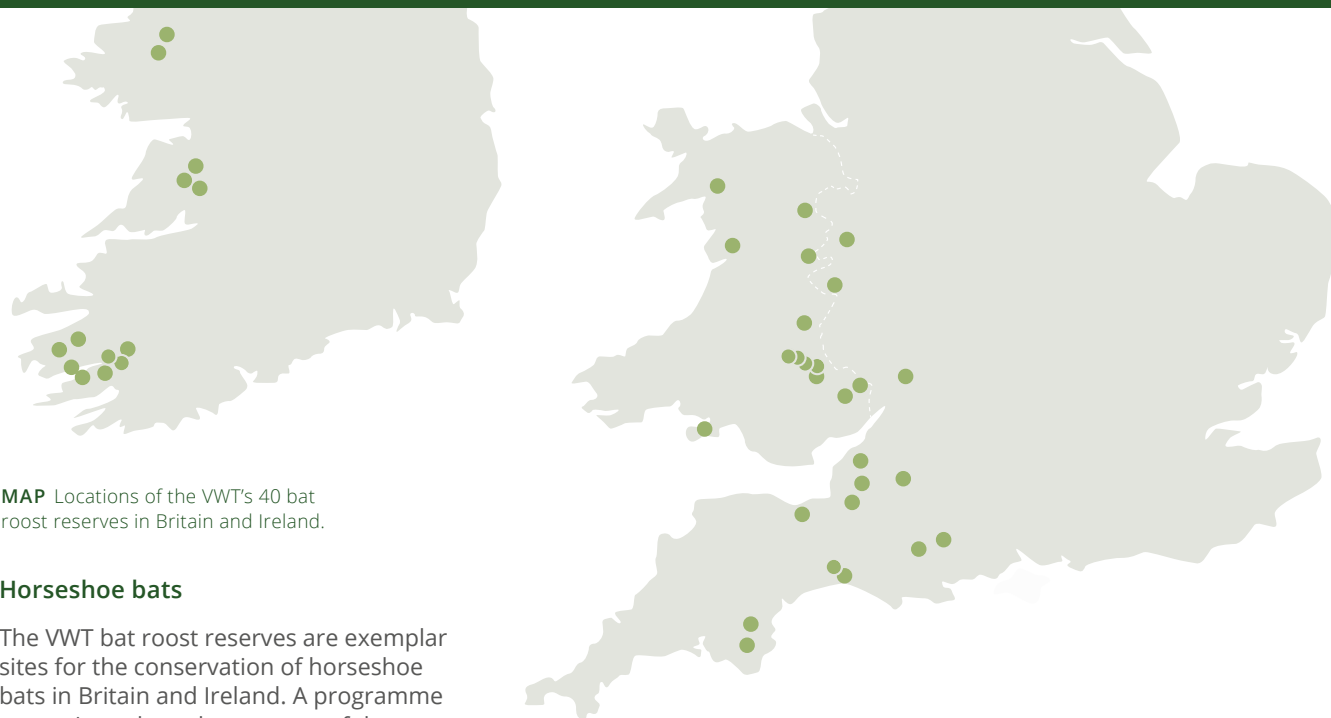
## Stoats and weasels

These represent the most challenging of the Trust's priority mustelid species, but the appointment of a Mustelid Programme Manager in September has generated momentum to initiate pilot monitoring studies in 2017.

In Ireland, our PhD student, Laura O'Flynn began analysing 55 specimens to obtain a range of biometric information, including age range and sex-typing.



# Our work with bats



**MAP** Locations of the VWT's 40 bat roost reserves in Britain and Ireland.

## Horseshoe bats

The VWT bat roost reserves are exemplar sites for the conservation of horseshoe bats in Britain and Ireland. A programme to continue the enhancement of these buildings for the bat colonies has seen the fitting of further hot boxes and planning for artificial hibernation sites to increase the resilience of the colonies.

The Trust has been working on wider landscape projects beyond the reserves. Trials of artificial night roosts have shown increasing uptake of these structures around some of the key lesser horseshoe bats reserves in mid-Wales. In south-west England, the Trust is a partner in the Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project to enhance habitat connectivity. Connected to this project, 2016 marked the start of a PhD project, co-funded by the Trust, researching landscape permeability issues for horseshoe bats.

The Atlas of Mammals in Ireland 2010–2015 was published in December 2016 by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. This landmark publication maps a baseline of mammal distribution from almost a quarter of a million records submitted by citizen scientists, recorders and through scientific research. Leading authorities on Irish mammals submitted 72 species accounts, with the VWT's Kate McAney detailing the distribution, ecology, habitat and current population of the lesser horseshoe bat.

## Bechstein's bat

The Trust's work on rare woodland bats has focused on developing innovative molecular techniques to develop a national monitoring scheme for Bechstein's bat. The collection of biological samples from colonies across its range in south England was completed in the summer of 2016; analysis of these samples allowed an assessment of the landscape genetics of this species in Britain for the first time. This analysis has shown that there are two distinct populations of Bechstein's bat in the country, and it has highlighted the fragility of small colonies at the northern edge of the species' range in Britain.

## Other bat species

Natterer's and whiskered bat are regarded as rare woodland species in Ireland. The Trust has been assisting in the development of a monitoring method for these species based on new bat detecting technologies.



**PHOTO** Roosting lesser horseshoe bat  
© Frank Greenaway.

**PHOTO** Bat boxes at Brackett's Coppice nature reserve © Frank Greenaway.





# Financial summary

2016 saw a 2% decrease (2015: 15% increase) in total incoming resources to £559,348 (2015: £568,342). Expenditure rose to £981,353 (2015: £915,687). Of this, 89% of expenditure was attributable to charitable activities. Net outgoing resources for the year, before taking into account any gains or losses on investment assets, were £422,005 (2015: £347,345).

The audited financial statements of the VWT for the year ended 31 December 2016 are contained in the Trust's full 'Annual Report and Financial Statements' available on our website.



**Ireland Nature Reserves - £60,267**

Maintenance & improvements - £16,212  
Depreciation - £5,698  
Field office costs - £28,469  
Support costs - £8,384  
Other - £1,504



**UK Nature Reserves - £192,032**

Maintenance & improvements - £36,161  
Depreciation - £12,975  
Field office costs - £112,379  
Support costs - £30,517



**Ireland Research & Surveys - £100,145**

Research & project fieldwork - £10,652  
Support costs - £19,562  
Field office costs - £66,427  
Other - £3,504



**UK Research & Surveys - £455,890**

Pine Marten Recovery Project - £180,451  
Bechstein's bats - £34,188  
Other research & projects - £23,613  
Field office costs - £78,617  
Support costs - £136,735  
Other - £2,286



## Project grants received in 2016

The Trust worked with a good mix of partners, volunteers and specialists over the year, including new funding partnerships with Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, People's Trust for Endangered Species and Wildlife Vets International.

Following the appointment of two new Programme Managers with funding support from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation over the next five years, this year marked a period of consolidation of bat and mustelid programme work as detailed above. Further fieldwork on other species was limited in the field, but future opportunities and partnerships were continually explored.

WELSH RAREBITS £250

Swift Ecology £600

Cuthbert Horn Charitable Trust £4,000

Henry C. Hoare Charitable Trust £5,000

POLECAT £6,250

Ellem Foundation £10,000

THE BIODIVERSITY CONSULTANCY £15,000

WOODLAND TRUST £17,500

IEN £19,440

CHESTER ZOO £20,000

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation £30,917

people's trust for endangered species £36,250

The Trust is grateful for all donations and support received from individuals throughout the year.

## How you can help

You can support The Vincent Wildlife Trust in the following ways:

- **Report a sighting** and encourage others to do the same. If you have seen a pine marten in England or Wales please get in touch.
- **Become a friend** of the VWT to receive newsletters and other updates on the Trust's work.
- **Donate to the VWT** to help continue our work on those species that need our help, including the rarer bats, polecat and pine marten.

Visit [www.vwt.org.uk](http://www.vwt.org.uk) for more details.

## Contact us

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## Follow us



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**Cover photograph: Polecat** © Anne-Marie Kalus