



December 2010

Aches and pains for conservation gains!

A big thank you to everyone who sponsored Neil to compete in the Great North Run in September. Thanks to your kind generosity a fantastic grand total of £620 was raised! This money will be used to produce and set up pine marten den boxes; an extremely valuable addition to our conservation efforts for the species. As demonstrated by the discovery of a scat from a female pine marten on a den box in Northumberland earlier on this year, den boxes really do work and provide safe sites for pine martens to rest in and, importantly, raise their young. We hope to put the den boxes up in Eskdale, Thirlmere and Ennerdale, which have been 'hotspots' for pine marten sightings in the Lake District.

Neil completed the race in a mere 2 hours and 16 minutes and didn't stop or walk at all during the run. Very impressive for anyone, but particularly someone who has never run a marathon before! And all of this was completed in an outfit probably not seen at the Great North Run before...



It's not too late to sponsor Neil retrospectively! You can donate toward our den box scheme using this link-<http://www.everyclick.com/vwtpinemartenconservation>. Many thanks for your generosity.

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Publicity

At the end of November, Lizzie filmed with the BBC for a piece on pine martens for Countryfile. The filming took place at Severn Trent Water's Tittesworth Reservoir in Staffordshire, just a couple of miles from where a pine marten scat was found by Derek Crawley from Staffordshire Mammal Group in 2004 and just up the valley from where a pine marten was photographed in a cherry tree in the Churnet Valley.



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The feature filmed Lizzie being interviewed by Matt Baker and Matt helping to set up a den box in woodland at the site. When the den box was up, a remote-sensor camera was set up on a nearby tree to capture anything that goes into the box. Only time will tell whether the box will be used by a marten, but for now, it's probably the most famous den box in the whole country.

Sightings

Since pine martens have had their debut on Countryfile, we have been inundated with sightings reports; nearly 50 in total!

Recent sightings reports have largely come from Cumbria, North Yorkshire, Ceredigion and Carmarthenshire. A couple of these sightings were very intriguing.

Firstly, north east Yorkshire, and two credible sightings from this area which continues to be the hottest 'hot spot' for pine marten sightings in England. The first sighting here was a pine marten glimpsed as it darted across the road in front of a car near Oswaldkirk.

Luckily, the observer phoned us immediately after her sighting to let us know about it. As the sighting was so recent, it was a fantastic opportunity to 'mobilise the troops' and within hours of the sighting, several keen scat collectors headed out to scour the woods for scats that the critter could have left.



A couple of weeks later, another pine marten was spotted. This time, it was near Ripon, and the animal was seen early one morning walking along the bottom of a stone wall. Again, more scat collectors raced to the area to look for any presents left by the animal and we await the DNA results of these scats.

Another very intriguing sighting came from the southern end of Grizedale Forest in the Lake District. A pine marten was watched 10ft up a tree for almost 3 minutes in woodland at the back of a garden. Rather frustratingly, this sighting was just 500 metres from a hair-tube, but when checked, the hair-tube had not been visited.

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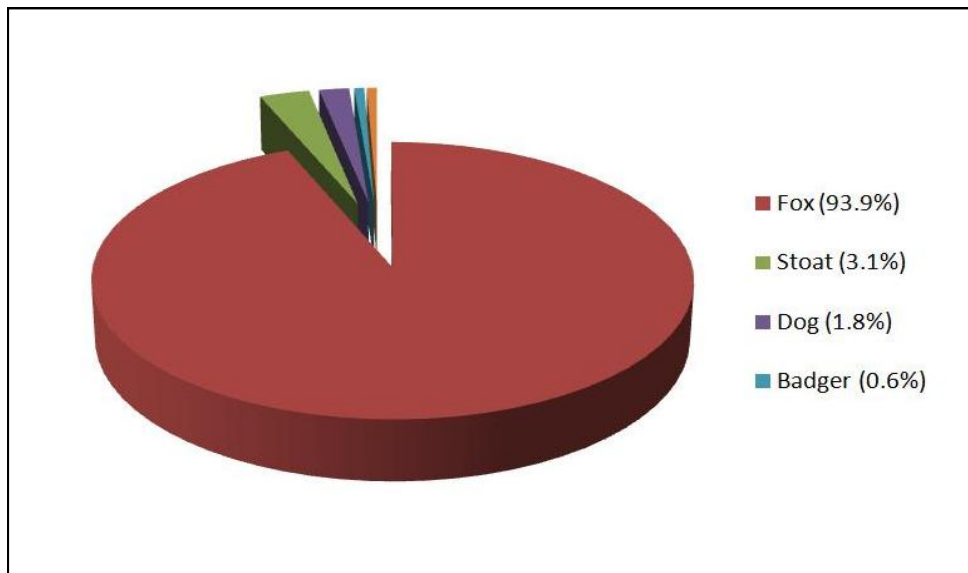
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The Great North Pine Marten Pursuit DNA results

As we eagerly awaited the DNA results from the lab following the collection of an impressive 261 scats collected over our 2 weeks on the Great North Pine Marten Pursuit, we hoped that the ever elusive pine marten DNA would appear in the results somewhere. However, this was not to be and our combined best efforts in the field have unfortunately failed to turn up evidence of pine martens from this series of surveys.

Of the 65% of all scats that were identified to species level, almost all of these (98%) yielded mammalian DNA. As the pie chart below shows, of these mammal samples the overwhelming majority (94%) were produced by foxes, which is not surprising. A further 3% of scats were produced by stoats, 2% by dogs and a single sample was collected from a badger.



The origin of a relatively large number of scats collected (35% of all) were not determined. There are two reasons why this might have been the case. Firstly, if the scat was old and weathered, any DNA may have been washed out of it making species-identification impossible. With these samples it's possible that they may have been from a pine marten but unfortunately we'll never know. Alternatively, the second reason for the origin of some scats being not determined is one of budgetary constraints. These samples will have yielded DNA but the early genetic screening tests would have indicated that this was not mammalian. As determining 'the origin of faeces' to species level incurs much greater expense, we decided not to sequence samples of this type further in order to save

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money that we could then reallocate to test a larger number of samples. It is not possible that samples in this latter category could have been produced by a pine marten, and many of this latter type are likely to have been produced by birds, and most probably game birds which can produce quite mustelid-like scats.

Alas, the pine martens continue to elude us. They are out there, as recent sightings show, but evidently pine martens in the north of England are very discreet in their toilet habits!

A huge thank you to everyone who joined us on the Great North Pine Marten Pursuit to look for scats. Your efforts were nothing short of fantastic and we simply couldn't have done it without you.

The search continues...



Merry Christmas!

Make your Christmas shopping count!

This year, why not raise funds for the VWT whilst doing your Christmas shopping? Using Easy Fundraising, you can shop with popular online stores such as Amazon, Argos, Marks & Spencers and WHSmiths, and at no extra cost raise funds for the VWT.

Simply register online using this link-

<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/Register/?char=22780>. Happy shopping!



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**Merry Christmas
& Happy New
Year!!**

Wishing all of our pine marten friends and volunteers a very Merry Christmas and a very happy new year!

Thank you for your continued help and support in 2010 and we look forward to working with you again in 2011.



Keep up-to-date...

You can keep up-to-date on any news and progress with the project by following the blog on our website. Go to <http://www.pinemarten.info/newsite/blog/?cat=7>.

Contact us...

To find out more about the project or how you can help us with pine marten work, please visit www.pinemarten.info or contact Neil directly: neiljordan@vwt.org.uk or 07799847740.

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