

# Pine Marten Recovery Project

E-NEWS Feb 2014



image : Edward Delaney

## Introduction from the Trust's CEO

If you had said to me six years ago when I first started working for the Trust that my team might be leading on the translocation of pine martens into England and Wales within ten years (by 2017), I wouldn't have believed you. It seems, however, that this prospect is getting ever nearer. Several pine marten projects later, scouting around for scant evidence of this elusive small carnivore has conclusively led us down the path of the need for intervention. Never has it been clearer that the genetically distinct pine martens of old are functionally extinct and that the remnants of recent evidence all point towards the pine marten just hanging on by the skin of its teeth in southern Britain.

In consultation with various stakeholders and external advisors, the Trust has decided to step up and embark on a feasibility study that

may result in hands-on help for this regionally declining member of the weasel family.

This newsletter is the first in a series that will keep you updated with our progress, report on all things pine marten and solicit support and comment on our activities. We will not be alone in our endeavours - many stakeholders and active partners are already engaged in helping with this work, including Natural England, the Forestry Commission and Natural Resources Wales. So we are in a good position to take the feasibility study forward, guided by partners and external advisors to whom we are most grateful for the help they have given us thus far.

In addition to individuals and organisations providing us with guidance, we will also be referring frequently to the IUCN guidelines for

reintroductions and translocations and paying attention not only to the conservation benefits of any translocation but also to the human factors that make a translocation successful. But I mustn't get carried away just yet as Jenny Macpherson will explain below: the feasibility study is only the first stage, but a most important stage, of the critical path of any translocation. We must await patiently for the conclusions of this study and then decide on our next steps.

Please feel free to contact the Trust with your suggestions and comments on anything in this newsletter. Above all, I hope that you will want to work with us and share our vision of the pine marten thriving once again in England and Wales.

**Natalie Buttriss**

# The Feasibility of Pine Marten Reinforcement

The VWT has just embarked on a two-year study to assess the feasibility of reinforcing pine marten numbers at specific locations in England and Wales. In the initial stage we are using GIS methods at a broad, landscape scale to determine where there is suitable habitat of sufficient size and connectivity to support a viable self-sustaining population of pine marten. Once these areas have been identified, there will be further analyses to evaluate the risks of accidental mortality to pine marten, from density of roads and other infrastructure, and also to identify potential areas of conflict with local economic interests. Once this is completed we will be able to shortlist a number of potential release areas for more detailed field surveys and

fine scale habitat assessment.

In the second phase of the project, which will begin in the summer of this year, we will be carrying out field surveys to determine if adequate prey and other food sources are present at the shortlisted sites to support a healthy pine marten population. In addition to this, we will be collecting baseline data at potential release sites to enable long-term monitoring of potential impacts of increased pine marten numbers on other species present, including grey squirrel.

We will also be working to identify local stakeholders and co-operators and engaging with them to raise awareness of pine marten and answer any queries, and also to discuss the potential impacts and benefits of an

increased pine marten population in their area. With this in mind we have already started a dialogue with the National Gamekeepers' Organisation and have an article in their members' magazine to be published shortly (see below).

By the end of 2015, we will have a prioritised list of the most biologically suitable release sites that have minimal potential conflict and high levels of local support for the project. During 2015, we will be drawing on all the available data to determine the most genetically appropriate source population(s) for animals and preparing a detailed plan for translocation and release of animals at the first sites.

*Jenny MacPherson*

## VWT Appoints Senior Pine Marten Officer

Jenny MacPherson has been appointed to the post of Senior Pine Marten Officer at VWT, co-ordinating our Pine Marten Recovery Project for England and Wales. Jenny's background includes research on a range of mammal species including pine marten, hedgehog, water voles and mink. She completed an MSc in conservation at University College London, where her thesis was on habitat selection by re-introduced pine marten in Galloway, and then a PhD at

Royal Holloway, where she continued as a post-doctoral researcher. She has practical experience of species reintroductions for both hazel dormouse in the UK and Ader's duiker in Zanzibar. Jenny joined The Vincent Wildlife Trust at the beginning of 2011 as project officer on the Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE) project, working with volunteers and local communities on surveys and the conservation of a range of mammal species in west Wales.



*Jenny checking a red squirrel tag as part of a study in west wales*

# Other Pine Marten News

## Pine marten 'Q&A' in the National Gamekeepers' Organisation magazine

The Trust has recently contributed to a 'Q&A' feature on pine marten reinforcement for the National Gamekeepers' Organisation (NGO) magazine. The chairman provided questions on various aspects of the reinforcement programme, such as the rationale for the reinforcement and implications for other species.

We were very pleased to have this opportunity to engage with the NGO and put forward our views on why we want to restore pine martens to southern Britain. The piece will be published in the spring 2014 edition of the magazine and will be distributed to their members nationally. We can send a copy of the piece to anyone who would like one.



image : Frank Greenaway

## People and Pine Martens in Wales project

The People & Pine Marten in Wales project aims to better understand and improve the situation for pine martens in Wales by raising awareness, improving habitat through the installation of secure den boxes, investigating current population status and by ascertaining public opinion on the potential proactive reinforcement of the Welsh marten population.

The project is currently in its second year and has achieved a number of core milestones. The awareness campaign has so far resulted in local coverage in the Cambrian News and national coverage as the subject of an episode in the Natur Gudd Cymru series with Iolo Williams, a thirty minute piece on BBC Radio Wales's Countryside Focus programme, and the main feature article in the June 2013 edition of BBC Wildlife

Magazine. We will also have a main feature piece published in the next issue of Natur cymru. I have also given 14 talks on the project, all over Wales and to a variety of audiences, resulting in much enthusiasm and positive discussion! All of this is excellent publicity and is contributing



image : Mike Unwin

*David setting a camera trap, with hair tubes in the background*

to the most important aspect of the project: raising awareness of the rarity and value, both cultural and ecological, of the pine marten to Wales.

We have currently installed 57 den boxes in areas identified as 'hot spots' or as having perceived value as connective corridors, and have plans to install a further 25. Though none of the boxes have shown signs of use, they are in place and being monitored, with a view to future population recovery. The advantage of the boxes is that they can be relocated should the need arise. Organising the work and constructing the boxes has been an excellent exercise in involving volunteers, NGOs and governmental bodies in the project, whilst actively improving the suitability of the target woods for the animals.

Given the effort and sophistication of the monitoring work, we can conclude with some confidence that the pine marten population in Wales is rare. We have predominantly used

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## People and Pine Martens in Wales project *cont'd*

camera traps and scat searches to obtain evidence, and have been unable to provide proof of presence so far despite rapidly following up promising sightings. The methods work; calibration sessions in Scotland and Poland have proven so, and the cameras have proven capable of capturing our other carnivores

(with the exception of stoats). The animals are either not present, or present in such low numbers as to be undetectable with the level of current effort. We have organised volunteer surveys of Hafren, Cwm Rheidol, Elan Valley, Llyn Brianne, Coed y Brenin and Crychan, and I would like to organise further surveys for Dyfy Forest and Gwydyr Forest, whilst re-surveying Cwm Rheidol.

We have also had the results of the Public Opinion Survey which

revealed the majority (89.8%) of the Welsh public that responded to the survey would like to see the pine marten return, though there is some inherent self-selection bias. 23% of respondents had NFU membership however, and of these, 74% were in favour of reintroduction.

*David Bavin*

## Distribution survey of the pine marten in southern Scotland

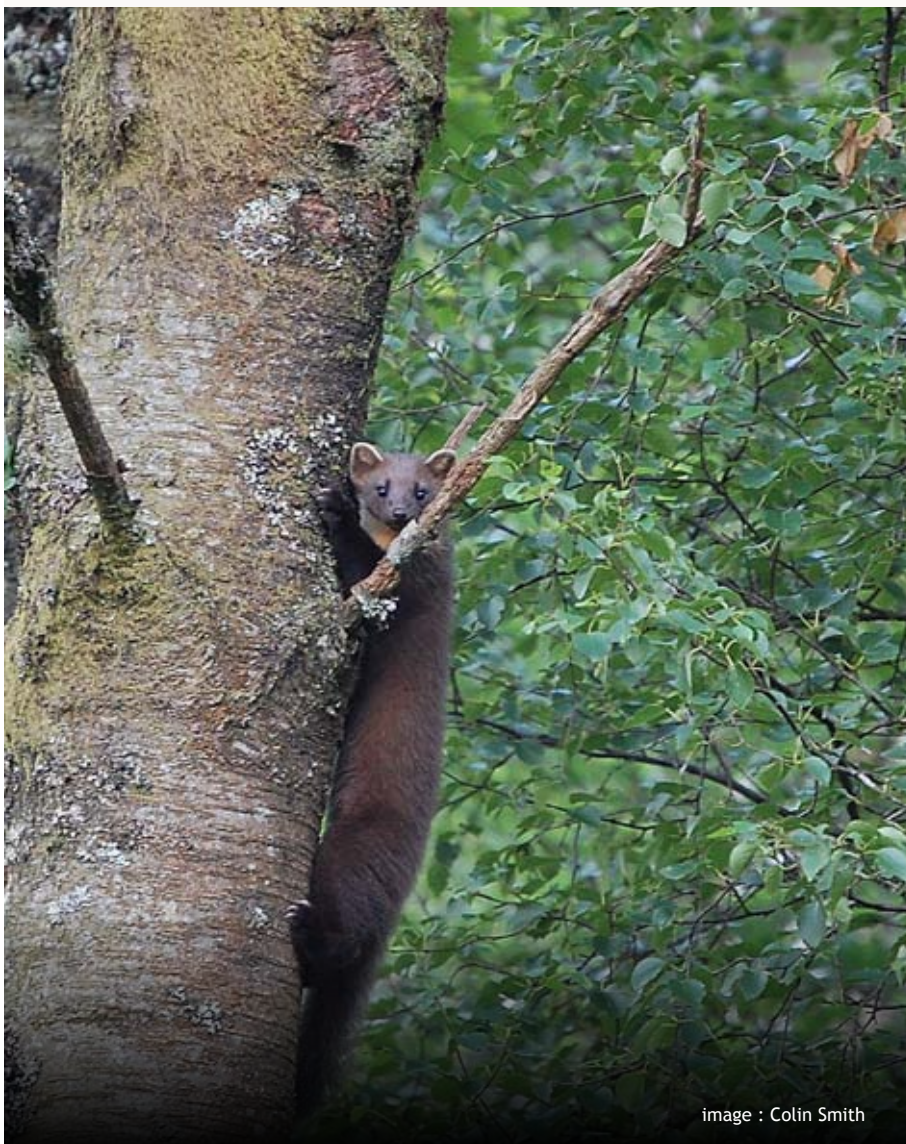


image : Colin Smith

In 2013, the VWT and Scottish Natural Heritage undertook a pine marten distribution survey in southern Scotland, following on from the wider-scale Expansion Zone Survey completed in 2012. The survey confirmed pine marten presence centred on three areas in southern Scotland (outside of the established population in Galloway Forest): immediately south and west of Glasgow, the Tweed Valley in the Scottish Borders and eastern Dumfries and Galloway.

Pine marten populations in these areas are likely to have originated from both natural spread from the core population through the Central Belt and unofficial translocations and releases. The proximity of some records to the English border provides hope that martens may soon spread south over the border and re-colonise parts of northern England where martens are currently very scarce or absent. The report on the survey is soon to be published by SNH.

*Lizzie Croose*

## Pine marten advisory leaflets produced

The Trust has recently produced a leaflet with the Department of Arts, Heritage & the Gaeltacht in Ireland, on How to exclude pine martens from game and poultry pens. The leaflet provides practical guidance on measures to prevent access to pens by pine martens, based on experiences in Scotland. This leaflet can be downloaded from our [website](#).

The Trust and SNH are soon to publish a leaflet that provides advice to householders in Scotland who have pine martens denning in their buildings or in their gardens.



## Irish pine marten day

The VWT in Ireland in partnership with Dr Colin Lawton (School of Natural Sciences, National University of Galway) are running a one day meeting on the pine marten on Thursday May 1st at the Ardilaun Hotel, Taylor's Hill, Galway. The aim of this event is to bring together all those with an interest or involvement with this mammal, including researchers, woodland owners and

advisors, farmers, members of the National Association of Regional Game Councils, staff from the National Parks and Wildlife Service and members of the public. The talks and discussions will focus on the current status of this protected species and its future prospects. Registration for this event is free but delegates must book in advance by emailing [Dr Kate McAney](#). More details will be available on the [VWT's Irish website](#) at a later date.

## New papers published on pine marten in Ireland

Two papers have been published from Emma Sheehy's PhD research on the role of the pine marten in Irish squirrel population dynamics. Congratulations Emma! *A non-invasive approach to determining pine marten abundance and predation* was published in [European Journal of Wildlife Research](#). *Population crash in an invasive species following the recovery of a native predator: the case of the American grey squirrel and the European pine marten in Ireland* was published in [Biodiversity and Conservation](#).



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