

Press Release



5 July 2021

New kits on the block for the Welsh pine marten population

Evidence from remote cameras has shown that Wales' rarest mammal, the pine marten, is continuing to thrive, with several females and their young spotted in the forests of mid-Wales.

Vincent Wildlife Trust volunteer, Laurence Dupont, was the first to spot one of the new arrivals. "Our moment of magic was when we saw some grainy footage of a pine marten climbing down a tree with a kit swinging wildly from its mouth - and then it returned fifteen minutes later for a second one. This was the first evidence of breeding in Wales so far this year according to the Trust, so it was great to feel we are contributing to the knowledge base of the project," said Laurence. The pine marten kits can be seen here: <https://vimeo.com/571243868> .

Pine martens were heading for extinction in Wales until the conservation charity Vincent Wildlife Trust began a ground-breaking project in 2015 to bring Scottish pine martens to Wales and restore a viable marten population.

Each autumn, over a three-year period, the Trust translocated more than 50 pine martens from Scotland, where there is a thriving population, to the woodlands of mid-Wales where the native martens had all but disappeared. Without this help, it is highly likely this native mammal would have been lost from the Welsh landscape.

"We have been able to confirm that the translocated pine martens continue to breed successfully in Wales. Kits have been seen in a number of locations this year. It isn't possible to give absolute numbers because while some females are using special wooden den boxes erected by the Trust across the release area, others have chosen more inaccessible, natural den sites in which to give birth, such as high tree cavities. This makes monitoring more of a challenge," said Dr Jenny Macpherson, the Trust's Science and Research Programme Manager.

Pine martens vanished from most of England and Wales primarily as a result of habitat loss and persecution. While pressures have lessened considerably, especially following legal protection for the pine marten, the species is certainly not out of the woods. It

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will be some considerable time before viable marten populations are back in their former haunts, but the return of this elusive, charismatic woodland mammal to Wales is an important step towards that goal.

VWT is always keen to hear of pine marten sightings in Wales and a reporting form can be found on the Trust's website at www.vwt.org.uk/report-a-sighting/

For more information about Vincent Wildlife Trust's pine marten project in Wales visit www.vwt.org.uk/projects-all/pine-marten-recovery-project/.

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Editors' Notes

For further information, please contact Dr Jenny Macpherson on 07794 985350 or at jennymacpherson@vwt.org.uk.

Accompanying photo may be used with this news release but must be credited 'Robert Cruikshanks'.

The Pine Marten

The Pine Marten is a native British mammal and one of our rarest mammals. Pine martens are a member of the mustelid family, which includes the weasel, stoat, otter and polecat. They are the size of a small domestic cat, with rich brown fur, a creamy yellow bib, prominent rounded ears and a long bushy tail. Martens eat a wide variety of food, including small mammals, fruit, birds, insects and carrion. They prefer woodland habitats and use tree cavities as breeding and resting sites but will also use craggy areas and manmade structures. They are mainly nocturnal.

By the early part of the 20th century, the pine marten had become extinct throughout much of Britain. Small populations survived in some isolated areas, including parts of northern England, but relatively strong populations were still to be found only in areas of the Scottish Highlands where predator control pressures were less.

Recent studies show that the pine marten in Scotland is making a good recovery and now we have signs of martens spreading south from their Scottish stronghold into Northumberland and Cumbria.

The VWT's Pine Marten Recovery Project in Wales

Whilst the pine marten population in Scotland is recovering and expanding, the marten population in England and Wales had been showing no sign of recovery and the likely outcome would have been extinction. It was clear that intervention was needed to restore viable populations of this native mammal south of the Scottish border.

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Although very rare, pine martens were still surviving in low numbers in some remote parts of Wales. With this evidence, reinforcement was considered a possibility, focusing on those areas within the marten's natural range where habitat and other conditions were suitable.

A **feasibility study** was carried out to identify areas in Wales with high habitat suitability for pine martens. Following extensive field surveys, engagement with local communities and stakeholders, and with relevant licences granted, a population reinforcement was carried out.

Between 2015 and 2017, 51 pine martens were captured in Scotland, in areas where there is a healthy pine marten population, under licence from Scottish Natural Heritage. These animals were translocated and released in forestry in mid-Wales. The martens were kept in release pens for a few days once they arrived in Wales to allow them to acclimatise to their new surroundings and allow us to monitor them remotely via camera trap. They were given a variety of food similar to their natural diet.

The translocated pine martens have become established and breeding has been recorded every year since the translocation began.

The Vincent Wildlife Trust

Established in 1975, VWT is a leading mammal conservation charity with a track record of delivering high quality wildlife interventions, based on scientific evidence. We are respected internationally for our mammal research and our innovative evidence-based ways of halting and reversing declines in mammal populations. We are currently leading the reversal of the pine marten decline in England and Wales, having spent more than 30 years carrying out pine marten research.

The VWT is also a leading force in bat conservation, specialising in the conservation of the two horseshoe bat species found in Britain. VWT manages nearly 40 horseshoe bat roost reserves in Britain and Ireland.

Read more at: www.vwt.org.uk

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