



Position statement:

Pine marten reintroduction in the Forest of Dean

Broad background

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's mission is to see more wildlife, more wild places and more people with a connection to nature. The recovery of nature and the restoration of native species is therefore at the core of Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust's work.

In Great Britain, several native mammalian carnivores have experienced historic declines as a result of predator control, environmental contaminants, deforestation and demand for fur. Current efforts are being made to reverse these declines. Since the mid-20th century, considerable recoveries in the ranges and populations of otters (*Lutra lutra*), polecats (*Mustela putorius*), badgers (*Meles meles*) and pine martens (*Martes martes*) have arisen largely through combinations of increased legal protection, changed control practices, reduction in pollution and habitat enhancement. Translocations have also played a role in these species' recoveries with releases of captive bred, wild-caught or escaped individuals.

The 2020 Biodiversity Strategy for England identified the need to aid the recovery and conservation of threatened species and habitats across the country. In 2018, The Government's 25-year Environment Plan explicitly stated that the reintroduction of native species was key to nature's recovery. The pine marten is one of the 18 most threatened terrestrial mammal species in the UK and in need of conservation action. This is in part due to its slow recovery in relation to similar mammal species as well as a limited range and availability of suitably connected habitat across its original range.

Pine martens in the UK

Pine martens were once common throughout the UK and Ireland but have undergone an extensive decline over the last two centuries due to habitat loss, hunting and extensive predator control. Over two decades of research by Vincent Wildlife Trust have highlighted the rarity of pine martens in England and Wales and the risk of species extinction. The pine marten is not only a charismatic and attractive part of British fauna, but as a woodland predator it also plays an important role in the natural dynamics of woodland ecosystems.





Recovery of the pine marten throughout the UK has been an area of focus for statutory and non-governmental organisations, with an aim to expand the range extent of what was a sparse and fragmented population, through translocations and population reinforcements. The species has a stronghold in the north of Scotland and its range now extends over the Scottish border, with an established population in Wales as a result of a previous translocation project by Vincent Wildlife Trust between 2015-2017.

Vincent Wildlife Trust undertook a feasibility study to identify potential locations in England and Wales where the reintroduction of pine martens could be possible, the Forest of Dean and lower Wye Valley was identified as a candidate site.

Pine martens in Gloucestershire

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust aims to connect and improve Gloucestershire's wildlife and wild places. The pine marten is a species which encompasses these goals, through the restoration of a species once found here, improvement of connected habitat to support its recovery and spread, and through engaging with the public to help us monitor and better understand this elusive and charismatic animal.

The Forest of Dean and lower Wye Valley was listed as a favourable release location due to the total area of woodland found in the area and the high proportion of broad-leaved woodland that it comprised. In the Forest of Dean particularly, there is commercial interest surrounding the relationship between pine martens and the tree damage associated with grey squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) and, although not a key motivation of the reintroduction project, findings will contribute significantly to current research on the two species.

In 2016, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, Forestry England, Forest Research and Vincent Wildlife Trust, supported by Forest Holidays and The Woodland Trust, began a collaborative project investigating the feasibility of reintroducing pine martens to the Forest of Dean and lower Wye Valley. Thanks to support from Forestry England, this vision has come to fruition and in 2018, a project to translocate up to 60 pine martens from Scotland to Gloucestershire (20 each year, over 3 years, commencing in 2019) was launched.





Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust aims to restore ecosystems, which include prey and their predators. We recognize that the introduction of a medium-sized carnivore may be a cause for concern to some members of the public. Potential impacts on existing wildlife and livestock were investigated during the feasibility study and, based on existing research, the likelihood of such impacts was deemed to be very low.

As a precaution, we have created mitigation strategies and guidance material, which is available on our website <https://www.gloucestershirowildlifetrust.co.uk/project-pine-marten-new-sept-2019>

To facilitate coexistence with pine martens and we are able to answer queries and provide support where necessary.

Contacts

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Vincent Wildlife Trust

