



Guidance Note

Squirrel control & pine martens

In 2019, Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust began a project which aimed to restore pine marten populations to the Forest of Dean & lower Wye Valley. This guidance note provides:

- information about the project and pine marten ecology
- details on the legal protection of pine martens
- advice on how to avoid trapping pine martens

Pine martens (*Martes martes*) are a native mustelid, in the same family as otters, polecats and stoats. They were once found UK-wide but declined across England and Wales in the 1800-1900's, with the only residual population in north-west Scotland. This species is now recovering in Scotland, but reintroduction projects such as this are required to aid the recolonisation of England and Wales.

Pine marten ecology

Pine martens are omnivores with a seasonal diet. Their main food source is small mammals which make up approximately 40% of their diet, dominated by the field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) which in peak years can be incredibly numerous. Martens will also predate rabbits, squirrels, birds, reptiles and amphibians. In the warmer summer months a large proportion of their diet is made up of invertebrates, particularly large ground beetles and dung beetles. In the summer and autumn, fruit and berries are important, constituting approx. 30% of their diet and mainly comprising of blackberries, bilberries and rowan berries. Carrion is scavenged all year round.

Pine martens are adept climbers, and they will preferentially rest in tree cavities, squirrel dreys and raptor nests, also raising their young (kits) here. They are slow breeders, averaging two to three kits per litter, and might only breed every other year. The young are born in March to April and stay with their mother until their first winter. Pine martens are solitary, territorial and hold relatively large home ranges which they defend against members of the same sex. Males hold larger territories than females. Martens are themselves predated by foxes and large raptors, but the greatest threat comes from road traffic and accidental or illegal trapping, which can make the difference between a thriving and a declining population.



Pine martens & squirrels

There is evidence to suggest that pine martens can have negative impacts on grey squirrels, altering their distribution and density. Population declines in grey squirrels have been seen in both Ireland and Scotland where marten population density is high. This has in turn enabled the recovery of some native red squirrel populations. It is hoped that in combination with effective grey squirrel control, the presence of pine martens may help to keep grey squirrel numbers down.

Legal protection

Pine martens are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Section 9 and Schedules 5 & 6. It is an offence to:

- intentionally kill, injure or take a pine marten;
- intentionally or recklessly damage or destroy any structure or place which a pine marten uses for shelter or protection;
- intentionally or recklessly disturb a pine marten while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; or
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any structure or place which a pine marten uses for shelter or protection.

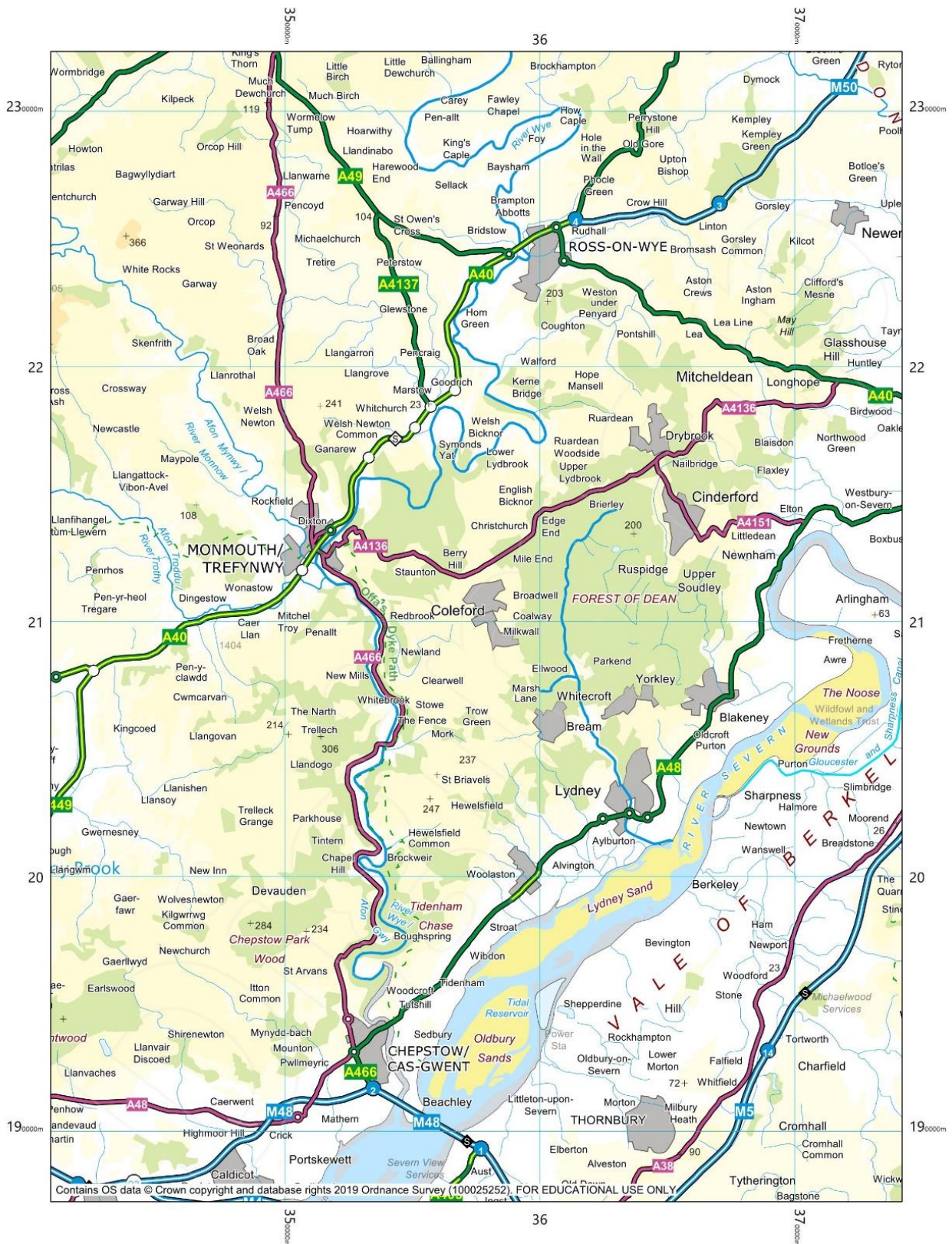
Squirrel control in pine marten areas

Control methods for grey squirrels should consider which non-target species could be impacted. In the presence of red squirrels or pine martens live trapping is the preferred method.

- Drey poking, spring traps and Goodnature™ traps should be avoided, as well as multi-capture traps.
- Traps should be inspected twice a day throughout the year (morning and late afternoon).
- Traps should be well covered to provide shelter & protection to captured animals and reduce stress.
- During pine marten breeding season (March-June), traps should be shut down overnight and set first thing in the morning for squirrels. This avoids females being away from dependent young for long periods. Since squirrels are mainly captured mid-late morning, this tends not to reduce trapping success.

If a pine marten is accidentally trapped, ensure the trap door is securely open and the trap is covered. Allow the animal to leave in its own time. To report a trapping event or sighting see the 'Contact us' section at the end of this document. Photographic evidence and location should be recorded where possible. This enables us to monitor the spread and distribution of the reintroduced pine marten population.

Map of central release area



Pine marten 'bycatch' is most likely in this region. Martens do disperse and range widely and it is likely that martens will be found beyond this extent.



Contact us

For queries & further information

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Email: info@gloucestershirowildlifetrust.co.uk

Online: www.gloucestershirowildlifetrust.co.uk/project-pine-marten

To report a sighting

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Eastnor,
Ledbury,
Herefordshire HR8 1EP

Tel: 01531 636441

Email: enquiries@vwt.org.uk

Online: www.pine-marten-recovery-project.org.uk/support-us/report-a-sighting

For further grey squirrel control guidance

www.forestresearch.gov.uk/research/controlling-grey-squirrels-forests-and-woodlands-uk/

