



Our Mammal Conservation Strategy in Britain and Ireland

Building on the past, shaping the future

The Vincent Wildlife Trust

A letter from the Chairman

Our native mammals, alongside all of our native wildlife, are struggling to cope with a range of threats, but often we are able to make a real difference - both species of horseshoe bat are doing well, and the discovery of the pine marten body in Wales in 2012 gives us great hope for the future. We hope that the next ten years - guided by this strategy - will be as successful as the last 35.

Our strategy for the next ten years is based on three conservation priorities:

- *conservation of small mustelids (pine martens, stoats, polecats)*
- *conservation of horseshoe and rare woodland bats*
- *innovative work on other poorly understood mammals.*

Looking forward, we are keen to work with others - there are many conservation bodies, all doing excellent work, and we want always to support and complement our colleagues in other organisations. Recent collaborative projects have been highly successful both for the organisations and for the mammals - some of our partners and supporters are listed on the back cover.

Thank you for taking the time to read our conservation strategy, I hope you find it useful. Do please get in touch if you are interested in discussing any of our work, or if you have any questions or comments, or would like to help the Trust in any way.



Dr Tom Tew
Chairman
The Vincent Wildlife Trust

The Vincent Wildlife Trust conserves a range of endangered mammals in Britain and Ireland through research and practical management. For over 35 years, we have managed our own reserves, undertaken pioneering research and provided advice to others through practical demonstration.

Our History

Conserving mammals since 1975

The Vincent Wildlife Trust has been at the forefront of wildlife conservation for over 35 years. We are not campaigners or lobbyists; our specific niche is as an organisation that carries out pioneering research, undertakes surveys to assess how well our mammals are doing and offers expert advice to others through practical demonstration.

Our work has always focused on the needs of British and Irish mammals. Currently our research is centred on the pine marten, polecat, stoat and the bats. We also manage around 40 reserves, primarily for bats.

Although the VWT is based in Britain and Ireland, our expertise is shared with, and gained from, other conservation bodies in the wider European community. The Trust has been involved in a number of European projects and is currently involved in long-term research and survey work at Nietoperek in Poland, the largest known bat hibernation site in northern Europe.

The Trust aims to:

- **Promote** the conservation of rare or vulnerable mammals through a greater understanding of their ecology
- **Conserve** mammals through the practical management of strategically important sites
- **Advise** on the needs of mammals within habitats and landscapes
- **Undertake** and publish innovative applied studies on our priority mammal species.



The Trust was founded by Vincent Weir in 1975.

Our Work in Britain - significant milestones



1975
Founded by The Hon. Vincent Weir



1977
Launch of The Otter Haven Project



1977
Otter Survey of Scotland



1980
Purchase of greater horseshoe bat roost in Devon



1983
Pine Marten Survey of Britain



1994
Pine Marten Survey of Scotland



1991
Lease of first lesser horseshoe bat roost in Wales, near Llangedwyn



1991
Otter Surveys of England, Scotland and Wales



1990
Research projects into conservation biology of greater and lesser horseshoe bats



1989
First Water Vole Survey of England, Scotland and Wales



1984
Otter Survey of Wales and Scotland



1996
Second Water Vole and Mink Survey of Britain



1996
Report on Distribution and Status of the Polecat in Britain in the 1990s



1997
First ever radio-tracking study of lesser horseshoe bats



1997
Hazel Dormouse Survey of Wales



1998
Purpose built bat roost constructed in Dorset



1998
First radio-tracking study of Bechstein's bat in the UK



2012
'People and Pine Martens in Wales' (2yr project) and Scotland Pine Marten Expansion Zone Survey



2011
'Our Beacon for Bats' (3yr project) and 'Mammals in a Sustainable Environment' (4yr project) in Wales



2010
Report on Evidence of Pine Martens in England and Wales



2008
'Prospects for Pine Martens' (2yr project)



2008
Publication of the 'Lesser Horseshoe Bat Conservation Handbook'



2004
Second Polecat Survey of Britain

Our Work in Ireland - significant milestones



1980
Otter Survey of Ireland



1991 - 1994
Joint Bat Conservation Project with the Office of Public Works



1998 - 2002
Lesser Horseshoe Bat Summer Surveys in South Clare, Kerry, Cork and West Galway



1998
Purchase of first bat roost in Ireland, near Gort



1994 - 1997
Lesser Horseshoe Bat Hibernation Surveys in Kerry, Cork, Mayo, Galway and Clare



2003 - 2004
Lesser Horseshoe Bat Summer Surveys in North Galway/South Mayo and East Clare



2006
Purchase of our seventh bat roost in Kerry



2010
Pilot study using hair tubes to detect Irish stoat along hedgerows in County Galway



2013
Publication of 'The Lesser Horseshoe Bat in Ireland: Surveys by The Vincent Wildlife Trust'



2012
Publication of 'Irish Farms and the Lesser Horseshoe Bat'



2011
Training courses at VWT reserves

Our Conservation Strategy

A new framework for our work, building on past achievements, but also embracing new opportunities and innovative methods.

The Strategy:

- **focuses** on practical means to mitigate the current threats to our native mammals: specifically habitat and climate change
- **continues** the Trust's measurable, evidence-based approach to the conservation needs of mammal species using the best available information: identifying at risk mammals, carrying out research and deploying solutions
- **identifies** processes whereby we can be involved with both landscape-scale conservation schemes, as well as in local, small-scale initiatives
- **selects** mammals through scientific assessment of their conservation needs. These might be rare and endangered, but they may also be more common species facing a new threat.

The VWT's bat reserves help towards maximising the conservation of priority mammals, from directly safeguarding threatened or nationally-important bat populations to acting as exemplars of good practice.



Derreen Bridge Cottage, County Kerry - one of several VWT bat roosts in Ireland.



Pencelli Mill, Powys - one of many VWT bat roosts in England and Wales.

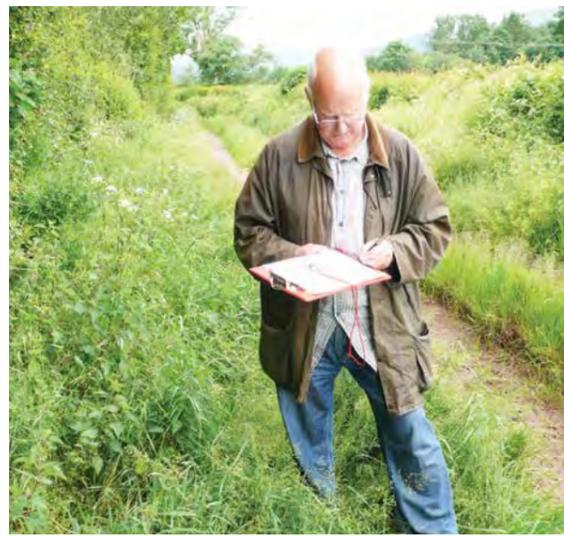
Our direction

Our priority mammals are those species in Britain and Ireland that we believe will:

- most benefit from our help
- enjoy a real difference to their long-term survival as a result of our conservation work
- profit from the progress we make in developing a greater understanding of their ecology.



DNA testing provides us with genetic information about our priority species.



Volunteer surveying hedgerows as part of local lesser horseshoe bat monitoring project.

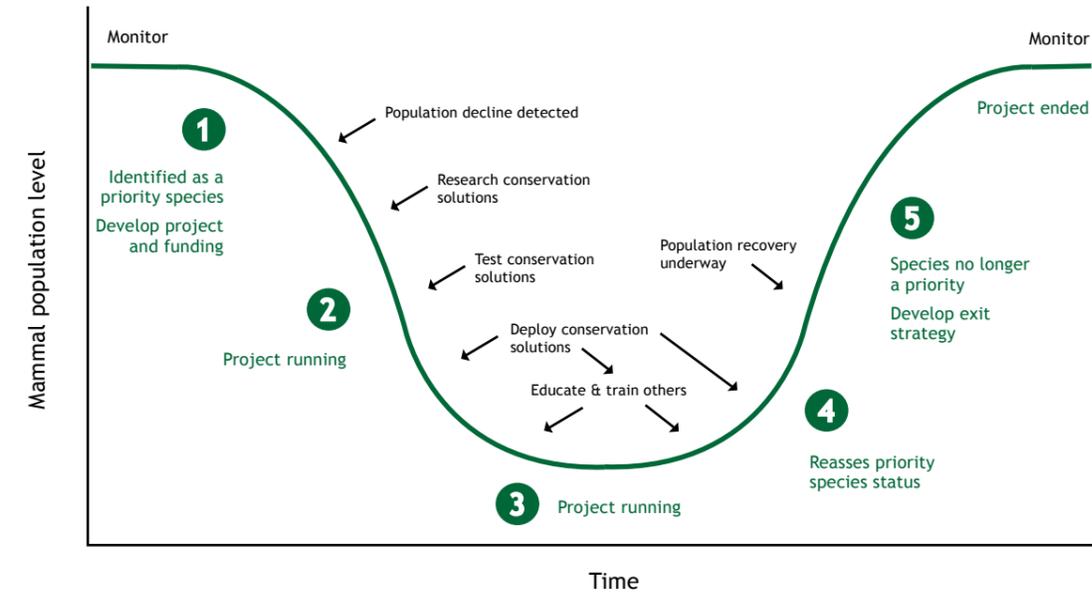
The VWT addresses the conservation needs of mammal species using a measurable, evidence-based approach. This approach is based on:

- identifying mammals at risk
- carrying out research that generates conservation solutions
- deploying these solutions and encouraging others to do so through education and training
- regularly re-assessing if solutions are sustainable
- developing an exit strategy when mammal species are no longer at risk.

Throughout these processes the Trust uses advocacy to draw attention to the plight of mammals at risk, to promote the adoption of its conservation solutions, and to influence the actions of other bodies in resolving conservation problems.

An evidence-based approach

Selection of priority species will be made using a staged assessment that includes an evaluation of the mammal's conservation status and an appraisal of the work already being undertaken by other organisations. Any action taken by the Trust will be determined by the species' position along an idealised 'pathway', placing animals at any stage from population decline to recovery.



Signs of recovery in the polecat population place this species between Pathways 4 and 5.

Species 'at risk' may be at any stage from initial decline to early recovery. The pathway stage will determine the type of activity the Trust will undertake to restore their population.

Our priority mammals

Priority bat species include barbastelle, Bechstein's and the greater and lesser horseshoe bats.

Greater horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*)

The greater horseshoe bat is one of Britain's most endangered species. Its slow breeding rate and dependence on larger insect prey make it vulnerable to periods of adverse weather conditions. Its highly specific roosting requirements mean availability of suitable roosting sites for this species is limited.



Lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*)

The population of the lesser horseshoe bat is in the early stages of recovery both in Britain and Ireland. Climatic factors, particularly a series of prolonged cold winters, could halt this recovery. In addition to climatic and anthropomorphic threats, competition for roosting sites with greater horseshoe bats is also a concern as small numbers of this species in lesser horseshoe bat roosts appear to displace colonies.



Our research includes interactions between greater and lesser horseshoe bats, effects of artificial lighting and designs for purpose-built night roosts. A particular focus over the next ten years will be conservation action to strengthen 'core' source populations of horseshoe bats and therefore their resilience to climate change and other threats.

The VWT manages the largest known maternity colony of lesser horseshoe bats in Europe with nearly 1000 bats. We want to use this and our other horseshoe bat roosts as flagship sites for others to learn from and apply our approach elsewhere.

Priority mustelid species include pine marten, polecat, stoat, Irish stoat and weasel.

Pine marten (*Martes martes*)

The pine marten is one of our rarest carnivores. They are slowly recovering in Scotland and Ireland but the situation in England and Wales is quite different. The main threat here is that numbers will continue to fall and the species will go extinct. We will continue to survey and monitor this species and, in conjunction with other bodies, work to reverse the decline of pine marten populations in Wales and northern England. In areas where they are recovering, we will monitor their progress.



Polecat (*Mustela putorius*)

As a result of persecution, the polecat's 19th century range was limited to mid-Wales. Today, it has made a significant recovery and is spreading across England from its Welsh stronghold. Increasing urbanisation may limit its recolonisation of some areas and polecats are also susceptible to secondary rodenticide poisoning.

The VWT intends to carry out national distribution surveys every ten years, with the next survey due in 2014. A study into levels of breeding with feral ferrets is also planned, together with raising awareness of methods for the protection of domestic fowl from polecat predation.



Stoat (*Mustela erminea*)

Although this species is believed to be widespread in Britain, determining distribution and population trends is difficult. Evidence from the continent also suggests stoats are vulnerable to secondary rodenticide poisoning.

The VWT plans to develop a robust method for determining the presence of the species and deploy this survey method at a regional or national scale, and carry out a rodenticide pilot study.





Advocacy

Within our Conservation Strategy, the Trust will use advocacy to maximise the conservation of priority mammals by:

- working with key players in the mammal or wider conservation world to promote priority mammal conservation;
- being represented in the national mammal conservation forums;
- working at a national and local level to promote agri-environment prescriptions for priority mammals;
- using the Trust's education and training programme to help further the conservation of the Trust's priority mammals.

Recent partners, supporters and funders:

Bat Conservation Trust	Natural England
Brecon Beacons Trust	People's Trust for Endangered Species
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority	Scottish Natural Heritage
County Wildlife Trusts	Snowdonia National Park Authority
Environment Wales	The Co-operative
European Regional Development Fund under the Ireland Wales Programme 2007-2013	The Heritage Council (Ireland)
Forestry Commission (England & Scotland)	The Mammal Society
Heritage Lottery Fund	University of Exeter
Natural Resources Wales	VWT volunteers
National Parks and Wildlife Service (Republic of Ireland)	Waterford Institute of Technology
	<i>We must also thank our extended team of external 'expert friends' who provide us with much additional wisdom and support.</i>

If you would like to know more about the work of The Vincent Wildlife Trust, please see below for contact details.

www.vwt.org.uk
enquiries@vwt.org.uk