

# The Vincent Wildlife Trust

July 2011 e-newsletter



*Dear Friend,*

I'm pleased to announce that after successful funding applications and many months of preparatory work, our two new projects in Wales have finally started. These projects - *Mammals in a Sustainable Environment* and *Our Beacon for Bats* - are featured on pages 7 and 8. This means we are joined by two new members of staff – Jenny Macpherson (previously with Royal Holloway University of London) and Kirsty Mallindine (previously with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority). Welcome aboard girls – please feel free to make contact with Jenny or Kirsty if their projects interest you.

As the saying goes, when one chapter opens, another one closes. Sadly, earlier in the year we said goodbye to three members of staff. In March, John Messenger and Peter Chapman, both field officers, left the Trust. They had worked for the Trust for many years and carried out some fantastic work. This was followed by the departure of Neil Jordan, a more recent addition to the team, whose two-year pine marten project ended in April. We wish our colleagues well in their future endeavours. A few changes in 'territories' and job titles are detailed at the end of this newsletter.

Although we know 2011 is going to be a hard and challenging one on many fronts, there is much to look forward to. Keep your eye on our website which is about to undergo another transformation soon. Also, at the time of writing, the Trust has just agreed to become a partner organisation in Batlife Europe, a charity promoting cross-country co-operation on all things batty! In the meantime our horseshoe bat roosts continue to prosper under the watchful eyes of Dai Jermyn and Colin Morris and their growing band of volunteer helpers, and Lizzie is hovering over the pine marten hotline to take your calls on any suspected sightings.

Keep in touch and thank you for your support and wisdom.

[Natalie Buttriss](#)

Chief Executive



## In this issue...

- New Trustee joins the team
- Pine marten update
- Spotlight on a VWT reserve – 'The Horseshoe Hilton'
- Spotlight on fieldwork – starting work at sunset
- 'Mammals in a Sustainable Environment' – new project!
- 'Our Beacon for Bats' - another new project!
- Bioblitz in Ireland – over 1,000 species in 24 hours!

## Introducing our new trustee....

Dr. David Bullock was appointed to the VWT's Board of Trustees in March this year, bringing the total number of trustees to five. David is currently Head of Nature Conservation at the National Trust and comes with an extensive background in ecology. He is an experienced and well respected manager of people and has co-authored over 40 peer reviewed papers on ecology, conservation and management of mammals and reptiles, including a number of threatened species. He has been a Member of Council at The Mammal Society, is currently a trustee of Wildlife and Countryside Link and a member of the Science Panel of the Ecological Continuity Trust. A Batworker Trainer, his particular interest has been the management of bats in historic buildings, which culminated in the recent National Trust/Natural England/English Heritage publication 'Bats and Historic Buildings'. For further information on all our trustees go to the 'About us' section of the VWT's website:

<http://www.vwt.org.uk/personnel.php>



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## Greater Horseshoe Bat Roost Update

The Countryside Council for Wales confirmed that notification is currently going through a consultation period for the greater horseshoe bat maternity roost we manage near Cardiff. This will hopefully lead to the roost being designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The designation may free up additional grant aid, which is required to enable further repair work to be undertaken at this important bat roost. To date, repairs and enhancements have included blocking out windows and doors, repairs to roof slates, installation of a 'hot box', pruning of trees and doubling of roof void space. More substantial repairs, however, are needed in the long-term.

[David Jermyn](#)

# 2011 news.....

## Pine marten update

### Pine marten scat found in Cumbria!

A scat, confirmed by DNA analysis to be from a pine marten, has recently been found in Grizedale Forest, Cumbria. The Lake District is a 'hot spot' for pine marten sightings but this is the first DNA evidence of pine martens in Cumbria for ten years! Out of thousands of scats collected and DNA tested during the recent Prospects for Pine Martens project, this is only the second to be identified as pine marten and only the third pine marten scat to be found in England during the last ten years. This is fantastic news for the VWT and all of the volunteers who have given up their time to help us trawl the forests for scats.

There are around 20 den boxes installed in Grizedale Forest, which will be monitored by the Forestry Commission this summer, and we have our fingers crossed that it won't be long until a pine marten moves in!

### Pine marten survey in Scotland



In March, the VWT pine marten team headed up to Argyll in Scotland, to undertake some pine marten surveys. Unlike in England and Wales, pine marten populations have recovered very well in Scotland and are increasingly abundant in many areas, making this a good area to test and validate some detection techniques.

The question of how to detect pine martens effectively in areas where they are living at low densities has perplexed naturalists and conservationists for years and undermines many surveys. Whilst in Scotland, we were joined by Louise Wilson of Wagtail Ltd - a company specialising in the use of detection (sniffer) dogs (see <http://www.wagtailuk.com/index.htm> for more information.) As well as using dogs to detect drugs, explosives and carcasses, Louise has been training Luna, her 'scat detection dog,' to detect pine marten scats, and we were keen to trial Luna in an area with a known pine marten population.

Over four days, we scoured the woodlands of Argyll and Kintyre for pine marten evidence and collected a rather impressive 157 scats! The DNA results showed that of these scats, 66% were from pine marten, with 33% from fox and just 1% that didn't yield DNA. These survey results are excellent news as they clearly demonstrate that scat surveys are an effective method of surveying for pine martens in areas where they are abundant. This made a nice change to our recent scat surveys of England and Wales, where collecting just one marten scat is a rare occurrence!

Luna impressed us with her scat detection skills, indicating on numerous marten scats. Many of these scats were some distance off the main forestry tracks and would have therefore likely escaped the eyes and noses of a human surveyor. On no occasions did Luna indicate on scats from



*Luna in action*



*Scats aplenty!*

any non-target species so this was a valuable exercise, and shows promise for future work in England and Wales following refinements in training and more field trials.

Along with the scat surveys, we also set up 30 baited hair-tubes and a couple of remote cameras. These were set in 15 pairs where one tube was pasted with commercial marten lure (a supposed attractant) and one with a control. Just one of each of the two tube types contained hair when they were checked a month after deployment and that is despite what appears to be a thriving marten population in the area, as our scat results testify. Indeed, in one case a non-visited tube augmented with lure was passed (<10m) on four occasions by a marten, as the photos below show. Unfortunately the marten was in a hurry (perhaps to get away from the smell!?) and so we only got shots of its tail and rear paws.



*A pine marten (or rather the back of one!) caught on camera*

We learnt a great deal from our trip to Scotland and being able to test and validate detection techniques in an area with an abundant pine marten population was an invaluable exercise that will help us to inform future pine marten surveys.

## What's next?

In April our Prospects for Pine Martens project came to an end, and it was with great sadness that we said goodbye to Neil - our Pine Marten Project Manager for the last two years.

So, what's next for VWT's work on pine martens? The Trust will continue to have an overview of pine marten monitoring and conservation in England and Wales, although unfortunately with fewer resources available.

We now oversee 154 den boxes in hotspots all over England and Wales, and with the help of land managers and volunteers, we will continue to monitor these to determine whether or not they are being used. We will also continue to collate sightings reports and any other evidence of martens that is reported to us.

We have developed a long-term pine marten conservation strategy, which highlights priority areas for research in England and Wales. These include determining factors limiting the survival and recovery of marten populations, developing effective monitoring methodologies, promoting targeted creation and expansion of woodland and continued assessment of distribution, status and marten behaviour in England and Wales. We will be working with a variety of statutory and voluntary conservation organisations to implement this strategy and the outcome of these priority actions will provide the basis for future plans for pine marten conservation in the UK.

## [Lizzie Croose](#)



*Kits in a den box: we hope that pine martens will soon be moving into our den boxes*

# Spotlight on a reserve.....

## Bryanston, Dorset

Affectionately known as 'The Horseshoe Hilton' and built in the 1790s, Bryanston Old Kitchens is home to one of the longest studied bat roosts in the UK. Back in the early 1950s, scientists and naturalists visited the building to 'see' the bats, and serious research was carried out including some of the first bat-banding - or 'ringing' as it is known today. Numbered aluminium rings were attached to a bat's forearm (radius) and subsequent recaptures informed lifespan, breeding success and how far the bats travelled between their summer and winter sites (hibernacula). One of the bats was recorded in south Devon, some fly north to the stone mines near Bath, but most still relocate to the old stone mines in Purbeck.



The site was purchased as a nature reserve by the VWT in 1994, and a series of improvements were undertaken to improve the site for the bats: the electrics were replaced and improved, the roof was replaced and extended and a second larger cave was excavated inside the building. The first cave was excavated in 1989 before the Trust purchased the site and was the first cave ever dug out of solid rock just for bats in the entire World! These improvements have allowed the colony to increase from around 100 animals in 1994 to just over 200 in 2011.

Apart from the greater horseshoe bats, a number of other bat species use the site, although not for breeding. The lesser horseshoe bat has been recorded hibernating here. Natterer's, common and soprano pipistrelles, brown and grey long-eared, serotine and barbastelle are also regularly recorded; less frequently, whiskered, Brandt's and Daubenton's are present.

One of the most important aspects of owning an old building is the need for regular maintenance to prolong its future. Whilst most regular maintenance can be scheduled as monthly, yearly or longer, Mother Nature has a way of occasionally throwing a spanner in the works. During the latter part of the winter of 2010 the unmistakable bloom of Dry-rot (*Serpula lacrymans*) was recognised in an old oak timber door-tread. As bat roosts are protected, Natural England was approached and asked for permission for the timber to be removed and for the surrounding masonry to be treated with a chemical that wouldn't harm the bats. The works were completed in less than one day and the bats probably never knew we were there.



*Dry-rot (Serpula lacrymans)*

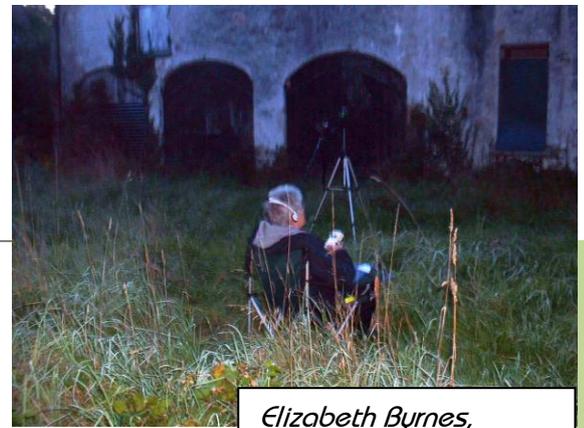


The Cave Spider (*Meta menardi*)- one of the many 'non-bat' residents at Bryanston

Although the Trust is engaged in mammal conservation we are always interested in 'other' wildlife that may live on our reserves.

[Colin Morris](#)

## Spotlight on fieldwork....



*Elizabeth Byrnes, volunteer, conducting an emergence count in Co. Clare*

### *Starting work at sunset*

I'm sure midsummer signifies many things to many people: solstice celebrations, busy times in the garden, state examinations, but for me it means just one thing - counting bats. Almost every year since 1983 I have been packing up my bat detector and heading out to a lesser horseshoe bat roost in time for sunset so that I can witness the animals emerging from their day roost. Apart from the pleasure this still brings me, knowing how many adult bats are using a particular roost is a means of assessing how well that colony is surviving from year to year. Initially I did this as part of my own research, but now I conduct the counts on behalf of the Trust and also to contribute to Ireland's annual monitoring programme for the lesser horseshoe bat, our only Annex II bat species. This monitoring is coordinated by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, our statutory nature conservation organisation, and involves staff along the west coast from Mayo in the north to Cork in the south, so covering the geographical distribution of the species in Ireland. By pooling the results from the major maternity roosts from north to south we gain some idea of the overall conservation status of this bat.

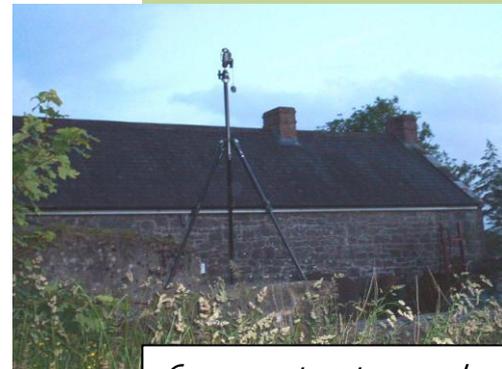
The Trust has 14 lesser horseshoe bat reserves in Ireland and we aim to conduct two counts per reserve in the weeks leading up to the first births. The counts should be completed on dry warm nights, quite a challenge considering the bad summers we have been having lately - so the first thing I do every morning is to check the weather forecast. Thankfully, the task of counting so many sites has been eased with the help of volunteers and with the use of camcorders fitted with infra red lamps and night shot facilities. There is vegetative cover at many of the roosts, which is necessary for the bats, but this makes it difficult to see them as they emerge, once the light fades, so at these sites we position a camera at a slight distance from the exit and record the entire emergence, playing back the recording the following day. This gives rise to the slightly strange sensation of sitting in the middle of the afternoon yet listening to the sounds of birds settling down at dusk.

It can be daunting conducting a count for the first time because although some of the bats fly straight out of the exit and away, some fly out for a short distance and then return before flying out again and away and others fully emerge but continue to fly outside the exit for a short while. I had forgotten how confusing all this can be until I started to explain it to a new volunteer recently. However, using headphones with a bat detector tuned to 110 kHz helps to separate the emerging bats from those just flying around, because the sounds emitted by the bats differ in strength and direction depending on what they are doing.

During 2010 a total of 2,792 lesser horseshoe bats were counted emerging from the Trust's Irish reserves, this represented 22% of the national population. I still have recordings for this season to play back so I don't yet know the final total. It will be interesting to see if the severe winter has had any impact on the numbers using our reserves, but the number of bats using three northerly sites has increased on last year's figures, which is encouraging.

Getting to bed after 1am over a period of a few weeks can lead to a certain degree of tiredness and there are times when I imagine I can still hear the melodic warble of the bats in my ears as I fall asleep. However, sitting outside a lesser horseshoe bat roost at dusk waiting to see the first flurry of wings and to hear the faint echolocation calls as the bats approach the exit point is still one of the highlights of my midsummer.

[Kate McAney](#)



*Camera set up to record bats emerging from a chimney, Rylane Cottage, Co. Clare*

# 2011 new projects.....



## Mammals in a Sustainable Environment



### About MISE

MISE is a new project funded by the European Regional Development Fund under the Ireland Wales Programme 2007-2013 (INTERREG IVA), and will set out to foster involvement of communities in Ireland and Wales in mammal conservation.



The nature of the Welsh/Irish INTERREG IVA collaboration will allow the sharing of skills and expertise across the cross border regions. Monitoring and conserving biodiversity is increasingly being recognised as critical for sustainable development. Small and medium sized mammals are key components of most ecosystems but can be difficult to monitor due to small numbers, elusive and or nocturnal behaviour.



May 2011 saw the launch of a new project in Ireland and Wales, **Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE)**. The MISE project will involve volunteers in survey work to monitor a range of mammals including red squirrels, pine martens, polecats, stoats, weasels and small mammals. The project is a partnership between VWT, the Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT), Waterford County Council and the National Biodiversity Data Centre in Ireland, and with the Countryside Council for Wales and Snowdonia National Park Authority in Wales.

*Pete Turner from Waterford Institute taking a hair sample from a trapped pine marten*



*Jenny (left) at launch event in Ireland*

MISE project activities that volunteers can take part in will include group scat hunts in woodlands, coastal or river otter surveys to find spraints, monitoring hair tubes for different species and using feeding stations or bait tubes to monitor small mammals. Training days and workshops will be provided throughout the year and at various locations throughout west Wales and Ireland. All the samples collected will be analysed at WIT where they have developed new DNA techniques to identify mammal species from both hair and faeces - successfully used as part of VWT's *Prospects for Pine Martens* project.

The project is part funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through the Ireland Wales Programme (INTERREG 4A).

[Jenny Macpherson](#)



....new projects.....

*Our Beacon for Bats*

The Our Beacon for Bats project is a three-year project, funded by the Brecon Beacons Trust and Heritage Lottery Fund, which will build on bat conservation work carried out by the Trust over many years. The project area, the Usk Valley between Brecon and Crickhowell, has one of the most significant populations of lesser horseshoe bats in Europe. Here, the Trust owns one lesser horseshoe bat maternity roost and manages four others. This project takes the conservation of the bats one step further, beyond their roost and into the wider landscape.



*Hi! I'm Kirsty, the new 'Our Beacon for Bats' project officer. I started at the beginning of April and have been very busy ever since. There has been lots of reading and getting to know the roosts in the area.*

*Steve Lucas at The Bat Conservation Trust kindly agreed to let me join him at the Smallholder and Garden Festival Show held at the Royal Welsh Showground near Builth Wells in May, so my first task was to produce some posters and literature. You can see from the picture I got carried away with my die cutting machine cutting out bat shapes to liven up the wall above the posters. Lots of people visited the stand over the weekend and were interested that we have lesser horseshoe bats here in the upper Usk valley.*

*My old university lecturer, Dr Fred Slater, had booked a week's course on bat detector analysis, but unfortunately for him (and fortunate for me!) he was unable to attend. He kindly gave me the place on the course, which has proved invaluable. The project has four AnaBats, which are bat detectors that can be left in the field for several nights. They can be set to automatically switch on at sunset and switch off at sunrise. They record ultrasonic sound the same as a frequency division bat detector, but without the need for a person to be present. Each detector holds a compact flash card to record the bat passes. This data is then downloaded onto a computer for analysis.*

*We have just started to deploy the AnaBats in the field and hopefully I will be able to report our findings in the next edition of this e-newsletter.*

[Kirsty Mallindine](#)

# *Race against time in Ireland ....!*

## Batting for BioBlitz

I had the pleasure of joining a team of over 70 volunteers at Dromore Nature Reserve in County Clare recently when we took part in a biological recording event known as BioBlitz 2011. This event extends over a 24 hour period and is organised by the National Biodiversity Data Centre in Waterford (<http://bioblitz.biodiversityireland.ie/>).

In the words of the data centre, 'BioBlitz is a scientific race against time, the aim of which is to find as many species as possible within a state-owned property'. Not only were we against the clock, we were up against four other national parks and nature reserves: Killarney National Park in Kerry; The Raven/Wexford Wildfowl Reserve; Ballycroy National Park in County Mayo and Liffey Valley Urban Park, Waterstown, South County Dublin.

The event took place between 1700hrs on Friday May 20th to 1700hrs Saturday May 21st. All the recorders gave their time on a voluntary basis, both recognised experts and general wildlife enthusiasts. I lent a hand recording the bats in Dromore by erecting a mist net at dusk in the woods with Dr Sinead Biggane, Conservation Ranger for the area, in the hope we would flush out a rare Natterer's or whiskered/Brandt's bat, or even a brown long-eared bat. While we waited patiently at the net, those on the bat walk encountered five species; the common and soprano pipistrelle, whiskered/Brandt's, Leisler's and Daubenton's bats. We added a sixth by catching a male lesser horseshoe bat, usually a difficult bat species to net! This was quickly frisked by Dr Paddy Sleeman who was hoping to add to the overall tally by finding a flea, but the bat was clean (Paddy did find some fleas the following day on a pygmy shrew). We were 'disappointed' during a night visit to a castle when the only species we saw roosting was - the lesser horseshoe bat. But, a Natterer's bat was detected in the castle on an Anabat during the night, so seven out of a possible nine bat species were found. At dawn we had fun watching soprano pipistrelles and lesser horseshoe bats as they flew in opposite directions along the causeway en route to their day resting places. The causeway was a good place to be during the event because a red squirrel was spotted there during daylight hours on Friday. A total of 688 species were recorded in Dromore, reflecting the diversity of habitats within the reserve, which includes woodland, rivers, lakes, turloughs, callows, limestone pavement, fen peat and reed beds, all within approximately 400 hectares.

The overall winner was Killarney National Park, where an amazing 1,088 species were recorded, double the number of species recorded in 2010, the first year of the event. I'm already looking forward to BioBlitz 2012.

[Kate McAney](#)



*Members of the public were able to join in on many activities, including bat walks, pond dipping, plant identification courses and dawn bird choruses.*

# Information.....

## Easy fundraising!

Help to raise funds for the VWT whilst doing your online shopping. Using Easy Fundraising, you can shop with popular online stores such as Amazon, Argos and WHSmiths (at no extra cost) and raise funds for the VWT. Simply register online using this link-



<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/Register/?char=22780>

Happy shopping!



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