

The
Vincent Wildlife
Trust

The Vincent Wildlife Trust Ireland 2015 Review





The VWT Ireland Review

In 2015, The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT) celebrated 40 years of wildlife conservation, and for the last 25 years this has included being at the forefront of bat conservation in Ireland. Today, our work in Ireland has a broader remit and focuses not only on the bat species but also on other mammals in need; in particular members of the weasel family.

Our specific niche is as an organisation that undertakes surveys to identify the current status of mammal species of concern, carries out pioneering conservation-led research, publishes the details of this work and offers expert advice to others through practical demonstration. Our innovative research has helped provide solutions to conservation issues locally and internationally.

Photo: Derreen Bridge Cottage, County Kerry, one of the VWT's 13 bat reserves in Ireland.

The Trust's bat conservation work in Ireland includes the management of 13 lesser horseshoe bat roost sites, which together account for some 25% of Ireland's lesser horseshoe bat population.

In Ireland, we employ two full-time members of staff based in County Galway. The Trust also supports a biodiversity internship in County Kerry and a PhD studentship at the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG).

This review is devoted to the Trust's work in Ireland and outlines our achievements in 2015. It also gives a brief financial synopsis and summarises our future plans. A copy of the Trust's latest Annual Report and Financial Statements is available from our websites: www.vwt.org.uk and www.mammals-in-ireland.ie.



Contents

Our work over the past year has been summarised in the following sections:

- 1 Message from the CEO
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Photo: Rannagh, Co. Clare © Ruth Hanniffy

1. Message from the CEO

I was delighted to be able to attend the All Ireland Mammal Symposium in Cork this year and hear about the tremendous work and knowledge that is being shared on mammal species throughout the island. It is clear that new techniques and ways of collaborating are constantly being found.

As I hope you will find from this 2015 review, the VWT has been working hard in Ireland to ensure that good knowledge is transformed into practical action on the ground. Ireland is an important geographical edge of range for the mammal species on which we focus and we have achieved a tremendous amount under Dr Kate McAney's leadership, assisted this year by a second member of staff Ruth Hanniffy and our Intern Patrick Lenihan. Working at a pan-European level is a strong aspect of our work and we continue to exchange expertise both between the UK and Ireland and further afield to other countries such as Poland.



There is clearly much public enthusiasm for the study and conservation of wild animals in Ireland as evidenced by visits to our website (www.mammals-in-ireland.ie), and raising the profile of our work amongst new audiences is an area we hope to grow in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "N Buttriss".

Natalie Buttriss, CEO



Photo: Lesser horseshoe bat © Frank Greenaway

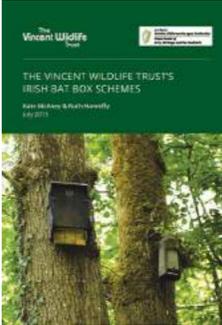


2. Raising awareness about mammals

The work of the VWT in Ireland is currently focused on the conservation of the lesser horseshoe bat, pine marten and Irish stoat and we engaged with a wide range of partners and the general public under two main headings: **Education and advocacy** & **Profile and publicity**.

Education and advocacy

Our educational work took on many forms: from dealing with public enquiries (approximately 300) to providing information and conducting more prescribed learning at workshops and field days for third level students. We also provided a number of training opportunities, both formal and informal, to raise awareness of mammal species and ecology and to equip volunteers and community groups with the necessary fieldwork skills for mammal surveys.



With funding from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (DAHG), we produced a special report on the data we have been collecting from a number of bat box projects, in place since 1999, and also collated data from other studies.

Photo: Ruth Hanniffy, Ireland Projects Support Officer, preparing for a workshop in Monivea during Heritage Week.

Profile and publicity

Our website, which was updated towards the latter part of the year, received over 40,000 visits during 2015, twice as many as our UK website, and represented a major increase in the use observed in previous years. 70% of the visitors were based in Ireland, highlighting the demand for information about Irish mammals. We used our Twitter account (just under 300 followers) to promote our own events and highlight those of other organisations where these related to mammal conservation and research.

Our staff attended a range of networking events, including those organised by the Irish Environmental Network (IEN), Duhallow Life project, Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE) and local authorities.

Photos: (right) The VWT in Ireland website and Twitter page, (far right) Dr Kate McAney leading a lesser horseshoe bat emergence event at Curraghchase House.





3. An overview of the priority work areas in 2015

Conserve rare bat species

Objective: To be viewed as the no. 1 NGO expert on the lesser horseshoe bat

- We highlighted the potential to incorporate targeted measures for the species in current and future agri-environment schemes at a national farming conference.
- We submitted proposals to raise awareness and knowledge about the species with several local authorities and community development companies.
- Our Intern based in Kerry undertook research using GIS to identify potential commuting routes for the horseshoe bat in north Kerry.
- We were invited to visit buildings being used by this species by owners seeking advice on how to enhance them for the bats.



Photos: (left) Lesser horseshoe bat © Frank Greenaway, (above) Farm buildings used by lesser horseshoe bats for roosting.



- We initiated research into habitat use by a maternity colony at one of our reserves.
- We were asked to author the section on the lesser horseshoe bat for the All Ireland Mammal Atlas, due to be published in 2016.
- We conducted monitoring and management of the horseshoe bat maternity roost owned by the Heritage Council.
- Our work of managing reserves was included in an Irish wildlife documentary produced by a French film company.
- A member of staff visited Poland to learn about a Polish EU Life project that involves cataloguing and repairing lesser horseshoe bat roosts and actions to change public perception about bats.

Photos: (top) Dr Kate McAney with film crew for French documentary 'Nature's Keepers', (bottom) VWT staff and Polish EU Life project Podkowiec+ team.

Objective: To increase the population of horseshoe bats in VWT priority areas

Although factors beyond our control can impact on the number of horseshoe bats that use our 13 bat reserves from year to year, we try to lessen the long-term impact of any declines by maintaining our bat roosts in optimum condition. During 2015, we recorded 3,136 horseshoe bats at our reserves, with increases observed at ten roosts, stable numbers at one while two showed a decline.

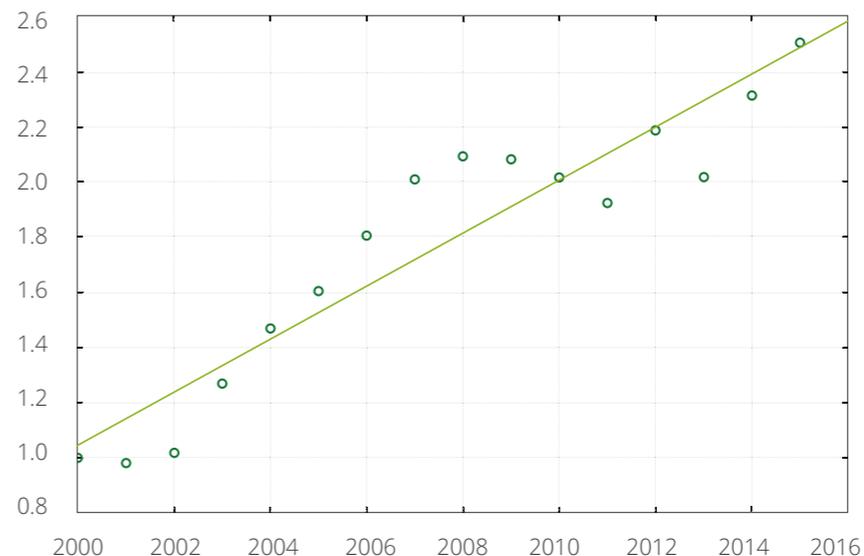


Photo: Fiddaun Cottage, County Galway, one of the VWT's 13 bat reserves in Ireland.

Graph: Trend Analysis of the Lesser Horseshoe Bat Populations in the VWT's Irish bat reserves.



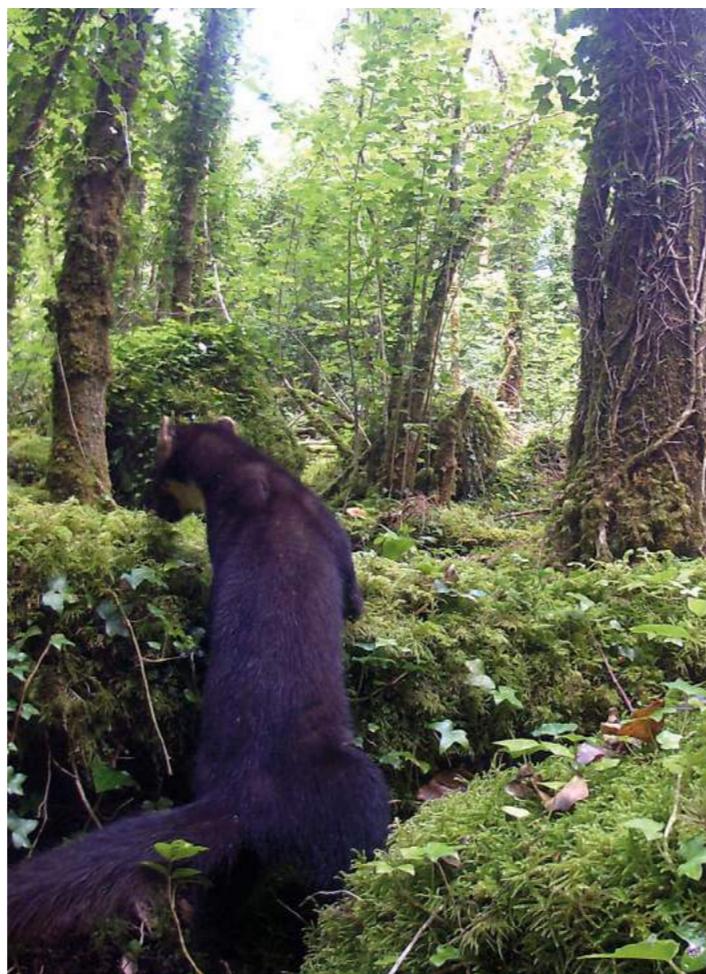
Conserve the smaller mustelids

Objective: To lead on pine marten conservation

- We provided funding to enable the continuation of a study at Queen's University Belfast into the behaviour of the native red squirrel and introduced grey squirrels when presented with the scent of pine marten at squirrel feeders. This study involved the use of trail cameras set up at feeders treated with pine marten scent so that any reaction to this by the squirrels could be recorded and subsequently analysed. The results of this research will be published in 2016 and will add to the knowledge about the interactions between these three species.

Photos: (left) Pine marten © Maurice Flynn, (top right) Project researcher, Lily, spraying a squirrel feeder with pine marten scent, (bottom right) Red squirrel © Ruth Hanniffy.





- We began consultation with poultry keepers and gun clubs to see how to reduce the risk of predation of birds housed in pens by the recovering marten population. Our leaflet on excluding martens from game and poultry pens was included in Gameshot 2015, the annual membership newsletter of the National Association of Regional Game Councils (NARGC).
- We began working with the Native Woodland Trust on a Local Agenda 21 funded project in Arden Wood to use den boxes and trail cameras to create awareness amongst the community and provide information about this native mammal.

Photos: (far left) Image obtained using a trail camera of a pine marten in Cong Wood early morning July 2015, (left) Closer view of a pine marten in Cong Wood, July 2015.

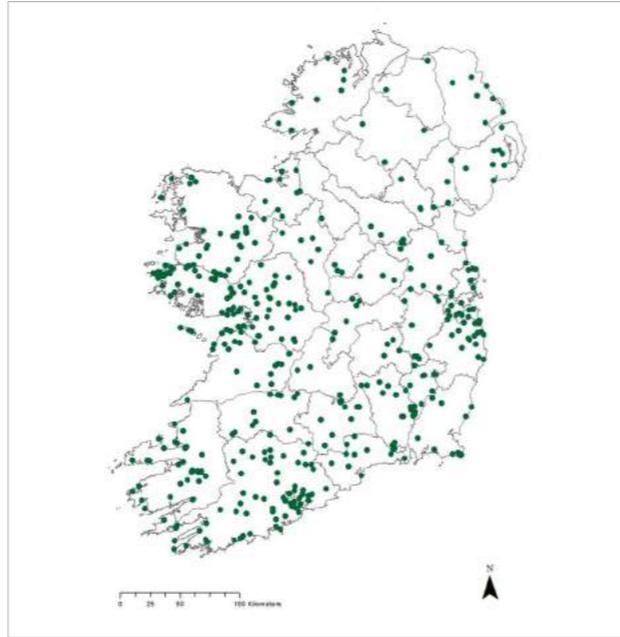
- We produced a leaflet that provided information on practical measures that forestry owners and managers could take to protect and benefit the pine marten.



- We created a database of the range of queries received from the general public concerning pine martens and encouraged all those who contacted us to enter their marten records with the National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC).
- We participated in one live interview with a regional radio station to discuss the recovery of the pine marten population in the east of the country.

Objective: Develop innovative, long-term work on other mammal species

- We continued to provide financial support and advice to the PhD research underway at NUIG on the Irish stoat.
- We referred all stoat records received to NUIG and encouraged all those who contacted us to also submit their records to Laura and to the NBDC.



Photos: (left) Laura O'Flynn, PhD student at NUIG, checking a hair tube, (above) Distribution map of the Irish stoat in 2015 as derived from Laura's research, (right) Irish stoat © Dermot Breen.



Public engagement, volunteering and staff

Objective: To ensure more of the public are aware of and involved in our work and to increase the skillset and knowledge of VWT staff and volunteers as well as external audiences

- Our Irish website was visited by 40,000 users during 2015, most of which were under the age of 35 years and based in the greater Dublin area, and the number of our Twitter followers increased.
- Although we had little scope for involving large numbers of volunteers during 2015, we were very grateful for the assistance provided by 43 volunteers during the course of the year.
- We created a database of contacts received from the general public via our website and emailed each of these a copy of our 40th anniversary newsletter.
- Twenty five walks and talks were given to community groups, third level students and conference audiences. We had an information stand at the Native Species Awareness event organised by Fota Island Wildlife Park in June, at the Wildlife Crime Conference organised by Irish Wildlife Matters in September and we also participated in the Intervarsity BioBlitz at NUIG.
- We presented an oral paper at the Teagasc 'Farmland Conservation with 2020 vision' conference in October.
- We provided posts about our work for the Trust's Facebook page throughout the year.



- We provided financial assistance to the All Ireland Mammal Symposium (AIMS) in University College Cork (UCC) in November, in addition one of our Trustees gave a keynote presentation and a member of staff presented an oral paper. Every delegate who attended the AIMS conference received a hard copy of our 40th anniversary newsletter.
- Staff undertook training on a wide range of topics as continual professional development, including Governance Code for Irish Charities, Media Communications, Defensive Car Driving, Time Management for Effective Leadership, Charities Regulation and Website Management.

Photos: (top) Dr Kate McAney at the Renville Biodiversity day © Ruth Hanniffy, (bottom) Survey planning in Wierchomli Wielkiej during the visit to Poland to learn about the Polish EU Life project © Ruth Hanniffy.



4. Plans for the future

The Trust is following a conservation strategy for the period up to 2023, which feeds into a business plan that is implemented on an annual basis. The main conservation priorities and outcomes planned for 2016 in Ireland are:

Objective	Expected delivery mechanism 2016
To maintain and enhance conditions for populations of lesser horseshoe bats around VWT roosts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Roost maintenance and enhancements• Liaise with adjacent landowners
To maintain and enhance conditions for populations of lesser horseshoe bats at other sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide advice to roost owners• Continue North Kerry landscape study with Kerry County Council• Work with the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) to examine the potential for a pilot agri-environment scheme

Photo: Lisduff Barn, County Clare, one of the VWT's 13 bat reserves in Ireland © Ruth Hanniffy

Objective	Expected delivery mechanism 2016
To progress a pine marten recovery strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up a steering group to discuss issues arising from the species' recovery and identify ways to clarify and resolve these • Field tests of predator control measures for poultry and game birds • Arden Wood Project with Native Woodland Trust • Promotion of householder leaflet and forestry management leaflet • Collation of records and queries received from the general public • Participate in the Pine Marten Population Assessment project with Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT)

Objective	Expected delivery mechanism 2016
To develop methods for monitoring the Irish stoat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the ongoing PhD study at NUIG
To ensure more of the public are aware of and involved in our work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publications, workshops and conferences • Media profile • Volunteer opportunities • Talks and public events
To increase the skillset and knowledge of VWT staff and volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff development plans • Volunteer training plans • Ecologist and professional training events



To access the publications mentioned in this Annual Review please visit the resources section of our website:

www.mammals-in-ireland.ie/downloads



5. Financial Summary

We are constantly looking for new funding opportunities and to form partnerships to help us deliver our Conservation Strategy in Ireland. We were delighted in 2015 to be able to engage a second member of staff, thanks to core funding from the Irish Environmental Network. Our research into habitat suitability for the lesser horseshoe bat was made possible by Kerry County Council who co-hosted our Intern. Our bat box project was possible due to a grant from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

We look forward to forming more partnerships in 2016 to help deliver conservation measures for our three core species, the horseshoe bat, pine marten and Irish stoat.

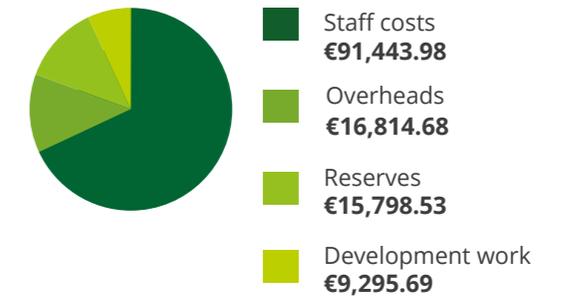
Photo: Pine marten © A. Achterberg

Income and expenditure (Unaudited figures)

Incoming resources - €133,352.88



Resources expended - €133,352.88



6. Our thanks

The Vincent Wildlife Trust would like to thank the following who help make our work possible:

Bat Conservation Ireland

Coillte

Kerry County Council

The Heritage Council

The Irish Environmental Network

National Parks and Wildlife Service

National University of Ireland – Galway

VWT volunteers

Waterford Institute of Technology

We must also thank our extended team of external 'expert friends' who provide us with much additional wisdom and support.

Photo: Irish stoat © Dermot Breen.





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Contact us:

Donaghpatrick, Headford, County Galway
Tel: (+353) (0) 9335304 | Email: enquiries@vwt.org.uk

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Cover photos: Red squirrel © Sam Rowley Photography
Lesser horseshoe bat © Frank Greenaway