

The
Vincent Wildlife
Trust

Annual Review

A Summary of 2015





Message from the Chairman

Dr Tom Tew

In 2015, we celebrated the 40th anniversary of The Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT). Forty years is sometimes said to be a signal of middle-age, but we think the Trust gets more vibrant as the years go by! Our mission to conserve British and Irish mammals remains unchanged, and we are as committed to our core operations - to save and manage bat roosting, maternity and hibernacula sites - as we ever were, but we are now also embarking on major new projects. In 2014, our founding father, the Honourable Vincent Weir, sadly passed away, and so 2015 seemed an appropriate time both to acknowledge Vincent's tremendous contribution to wildlife conservation and to celebrate the Trust's past, and to look forward to an exciting future.

From its inception in 1975, the VWT has gone from strength to strength. Today, it is one of Britain's leading mammal charities and a pioneer in the field of conservation-led research. The Trust's national otter and water vole surveys in the 1980s and 1990s highlighted the enormity of two wildlife disasters; in the case of the water vole it was just in time. Its expertise in bat roost management and roost design techniques has played a major role in safeguarding colonies of horseshoe bats in particular, and in 2015 the Trust started a project to help the pine marten to once again flourish in the forests of southern Britain, an important step towards restoring a healthy woodland ecosystem.

The Trust continues to proactively seek out carefully chosen partnerships, additional

funding sources from third parties and to embrace new forms of communication. These strategies have ensured that the Trust remains a resilient, relevant and respected wildlife charity. In the Trust's 40th year, it has signed partnership agreements with major players and holds its own when it comes to good quality national media coverage.

There is, however, still much to do for mammals in need. There are wider geographical boundaries and conservation issues to consider and the Trust is increasingly working with European wildlife organisations. There are still large information gaps, and conflicts to resolve, for many mammals, and as our landscape and climate continues to change, so new challenges are becoming apparent.

An increasing number of largescale landscape initiatives, such as the Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project, are providing the Trust with opportunities to collaborate with other organisations on the monitoring and conservation of both rare and widespread but poorly understood mammals. It is with great delight, therefore, that we are able to confirm funding of some £300,000 from the **Esmée Fairbairn Foundation** at the beginning of 2016 to support two new Programme Manager posts to assist with a further step change for the Trust over the next five years.

We look forward to another 40 years helping British and Irish mammals to survive and thrive in the modern landscape.

Summary of activity in 2015

Volunteer involvement



Volunteers
involved in 2015



1,755 hours
volunteering



Volunteer activity
focused on the Pine Marten
Recovery Project

Volunteers were also involved with the Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE) project and bat roost monitoring. We provided training opportunities to raise awareness of mammal species ecology and to equip volunteers with fieldwork skills. In Ireland, an agreement with the Burren Conservation Volunteers ensured on-going maintenance at one of our bat roost reserves.

Education and advocacy



1,744 enquiries
from the public



Reports published
as well as advisory notes



45 Talks
given at conferences,
Universities and to other groups

The Trust also held field days for both professional ecologists and keen amateur naturalists. We ran an end of project event for the MISE project. We hosted several bat walks and attended many local events and shows in Wales and Ireland. Several community meetings were also held to discuss the Pine Marten Recovery Project.

Profile and publicity



Website visits
to our new Ireland site



63 media items
featured or mentioned the WWT



4,000 followers
each on our Facebook and
Twitter accounts

Two new leaflets and two e-newsletters were produced and a book titled 'From Mallards to Martens' was published for the Trust's 40th anniversary. These activities and materials provided valuable opportunities to engage new audiences and provided a bespoke message to readers, listeners and conference audiences.

Our work with mustelids

Pine martens

In the autumn of 2015, as part of the Pine Marten Recovery Project, 20 pine martens were translocated from Scotland to Wales. This was after almost two years of preparation, acquiring the appropriate licences and permissions, liaising and consulting with local communities, and undertaking a Disease Risk Analysis for which we commissioned Dr Alex Tomlinson of **Wildlife Vets International**. The translocated martens were all radio-collared and radio-tracked on a daily basis, giving us vital data on their whereabouts, movements and territory patterns. The early signs by the end of the year were encouraging, with the majority of animals settling into the woodlands of the release region.



Photo: A still image from a camera trap of one of the translocated pine martens in its release pen

In Ireland our pine marten work focused on the engagement of gun clubs, householders and the **National Parks & Wildlife Service** rangers. We partnered with the **Native Woodland Trust** on the Arden Wood Project where we gave lectures and donated two pine marten den boxes for erection in the woods. We were also involved in surveying woods for a national pine marten population survey at the request of **Waterford Institute of Technology**.



Photo: Polecat kit living on a farm in Merioneth, photo submitted by Nikki Charlton during our polecat survey

Polecats

The second year of our two-year national polecat survey was completed successfully, with 1,760 records received; of these 42% were verifiable. The survey generated a good deal of media coverage and public interest and several talks have been given over the year. In addition, 265 carcasses were collected from volunteers in collaboration with the **Centre for Ecology and Hydrology**. These will provide laboratory material for research, in particular for a PhD study supported by the Trust's first Vincent Weir bursary awarded to Katie Sainsbury. Katie will be studying the ecology and genetics of the polecat, in addition to looking at the levels of rodenticide poisoning.

Stoats and weasels

It has been difficult to pick up momentum on these two species in England and Wales since the completion of the MISE project and with staff resources concentrated on the pine marten project. However, in Ireland, the Trust is supporting a PhD on the Irish Stoat based at the **National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG)**. We referred all Irish stoat records to NUIG and a very comprehensive species distribution map was completed.

Our work with bats

Horseshoe bats

The data collected on the numbers of bats emerging from Trust managed roosts continued to show an increase in populations of both greater and lesser horseshoe bats (circa. 40 roosts monitored). Furthermore, monitoring of temporary roost designs (being trialled in the upper Usk Valley in Mid Wales) are also showing signs of success with small numbers of bats using roosts which are designed to help improve landscape permeability. The roost buildings that we manage continue to be maintained to a high standard, with an increased focus on advising others through organised visits, such as those provided in partnership with the **Devon Greater Horseshoe Bat Project**.

Research continued to find a solution for preventing greater horseshoe bats from disrupting lesser horseshoe bat colonies; a trend that appears to be increasing. Colin Morris, Reserves Manager, has been trialling specially designed tubes at two roost entrances to limit ingress and egress to the smaller lesser horseshoe bats. One of these trials is showing signs of success. The successful approach will be written up when results are conclusive.



Photo: Greater horseshoe bat © Frank Greenaway

The Impact of Street Lighting on Biodiversity project, in which we were a sub-contractor to the **University of Exeter**, came to an end in March. These are being prepared for submission as PhD and MRes studies.

Work in Ireland has progressed with GIS habitat mapping in conjunction with **Kerry County Council**. The employment of an intern has helped to progress a model that will help to prioritise areas that the bats are likely to pass through in order to help the population of the species to expand across a 'gap' in the landscape. Our advocacy work in Ireland highlighted the potential to incorporate targeted measures for the species in current and future agri-environment schemes at a national farming conference. We also submitted proposals to raise awareness of the species with several local authorities and community development companies.



Photo: Bechstein's bat PhD student Patrick Wright

Bechstein's bat

Data from the bat box ringing project at **Dorset Wildlife Trust's** Bracketts Coppice nature reserve has stepped up a gear. A PhD student, co-supervised by the Trust and **Exeter University**, started in January and he has been taking samples from the bats to progress new advances in genetic techniques.

Other work

MISE project

The Mammals in a Sustainable Environment project (funded by the **EU funded Ireland-Wales co-operation programme**) completed in June 2015 with the findings celebrated at two showcase events in May at venues in Ireland and Wales. A number of committed and enthused volunteers have been trained and are now aware of the work of the VWT.



Photo: Queen's University Belfast project researcher, Lily, spraying a squirrel feeder with pine marten scent

Pine marten and squirrels

The Trust is a co-supervisor for a PhD study of the relationship between pine martens and squirrels, focusing on the behaviour of grey squirrels when pine martens are recovering. The research is in its first year with results not yet available. There is already, however, a large body of interest from forestry sectors because of the link between grey squirrels and tree damage. In Ireland, the Trust provided funding to **Queen's University Belfast** to study the behaviour of the native red 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 the feeders that had been treated with pine marten scent so that any reaction to this by the squirrels could be recorded and subsequently analysed.

Pygmy shrew

The Trust's interest in pygmy shrew research in Ireland continues with the part-funding of **University College Dublin** work into diet competition with the invasive greater white-toothed shrew. The rapid decline of the pygmy shrew in Ireland gives real cause for concern.

Raising awareness

The VWT websites and publications were refreshed and a book about the VWT, entitled 'From Mallards to Martens', was published for our 40th Anniversary. Media coverage included articles in national broadsheets and coverage on BBC TV and radio programmes. We also had a strong presence at the All-Ireland Mammal Symposium.

Partnerships

We continued to attract new partners and funders including **Chester Zoo**, the **Woodland Trust**, **People's Trust for Endangered Species**, **Wildlife Vets International**, and the **POLECAT company**. Our support of PhD studies also ensures a small pool of people working on novel research and extends our ability to work with new techniques and University departments on new ideas.



Photo: The VWT's Hilary Macmillan and Natalie Buttriss with staff from Chester Zoo

Financial summary

2015 saw a 15% increase in total incoming resources to £568,342 (2014: £495,598). Expenditure rose to £915,687 (2014: £767,189). Of this, 87% of expenditure was attributable to charitable activities. Net outgoing resources for the year, before taking into account any gains or losses on investment assets, were £347,345 (2014: £271,591).

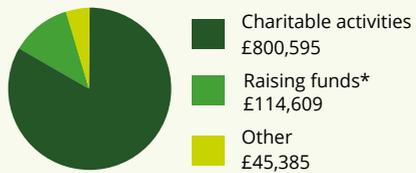
The audited financial statements of the VWT for the year ended 31 December 2015 are contained in the Trust's full 'Annual Report and Financial Statements' available at www.vwt.org.uk/resources.

Income and expenditure

Incoming resources - £568,342



Resources expended - £915,687



*This includes £94,220 of Investment management fees to grow the investment capital (c.£14.9M) and generate income from investments.

Charitable activities

UK Nature Reserves - £147,770

Maintenance & improvements - £20,421
 Depreciation - £12,975
 Field office costs - £96,439
 Support costs - £17,935

UK Research & Surveys - £486,792

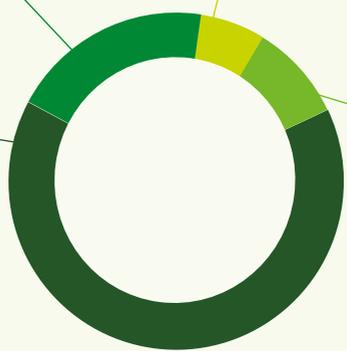
MISE project - £16,040
 Education/awareness - £28,067
 Impact of Street Lighting - £9,076
 Pine Marten Recovery Project - £212,301
 Eurobats - £190
 Bechstein's bats - £11,599
 Other research & projects - £1,287
 Field office costs - £59,471
 Support costs - £149,685

Ireland Nature Reserves - £49,272

Maintenance & improvements - £15,916
 Depreciation - £5,698
 Field office costs - £23,671
 Support costs - £3,139
 Other - £848

Ireland Research & Surveys - £71,375

Support costs - £7,323
 Research & project fieldwork - £6,842
 Field office costs - £55,232
 Other - £1,978



Our thanks

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



£113,847.92 *
European Regional Development Fund
Ireland-Wales Programme (via Waterford Institute of Technology)



£9,075.56
DEFRA (via Exeter University)



£33,800
People's Trust for Endangered Species

£7,000 Ellem Foundation



£4,687.50
POLECAT company



£20,000
Chester Zoo

£4,000 Cuthbert Horn Charitable Trust
£4,000 Henry C. Hoare Charitable Trust



£12,387.09*
Irish Environmental Network



£3,646.86*
National Parks & Wildlife Service



£10,000
The Co-operative Wales Membership



£3,146.62*
Heritage Council



£10,000
Woodland Trust



£1,220.52*
United Nations (Eurobats)

£500 The Oakdale Trust

*Grants received in Euros with currency exchange rates applied at date of receipt

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