



Stoats and weasels caught on camera

Gareth volunteers to help monitor stoats and weasels using Mostelas **p4**



Also in this issue...

Picture Perfect

A compilation of wild and wonderful creatures, all photographed by VWT volunteers

Conservation and Education

Lewis reflects on how volunteering has enhanced his studies at University

Wild about Ballyhoura's Bats

A community-led initiative to monitor lesser horseshoe bats in Ireland

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Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of Vincent Wildlife Trust's Volunteer Newsletter.

In response to a survey that we conducted at the beginning of the year, many of you expressed an interest in hearing more about other VWT projects, what they involve and how volunteers are contributing to the Trust as a whole.

This was extremely valuable feedback and, as a way of addressing this issue, we have created a volunteer newsletter, which is a first for VWT. We hope it will be the start of many more to come.

I hope you enjoy reading all of the features in this issue and I look forward to hearing any suggestions for future editions. Lastly, thank you for choosing



to volunteer with VWT; without the time and efforts of our volunteers, we would not be able to make such a positive impact within mammal conservation.

Gemma Fisher
Volunteering and Community Engagement Officer



Volunteers play such an important role at Vincent Wildlife Trust and, without you, we wouldn't achieve a fraction of what we do. Volunteers gave a total of 4,003 hours in 2017, which equates to £25,019... and we are delighted that 2018 is also looking to have just as much volunteer involvement.

We have volunteering opportunities across a number of projects, and in different parts of Britain and Ireland. With VWT's Pine Marten Recovery Project (PMRP), for example, volunteers can help to monitor pine martens using our camera trap scheme and send in interesting sightings and footage of animals captured on camera. Volunteers can also help with weasel and stoat surveys, bat counts, reserve maintenance, and with some of our research projects.

Thank you for all that you have done so far, and we look forward to working with you in the new year.

Lucy Rogers
CEO

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Gareth shares his experience of recording these elusive mammals using Mostelas

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Picture Perfect p6

A compilation of wild and wonderful creatures, great and small, all photographed by VWT volunteers.



Education and Conservation p8

Lewis, a Back from the Brink volunteer, shares some of his insights and ideas around mixing university studies with conservation volunteering.



Wild about Ballyhoura's Bats p10

Rhiannon Laubach from Ballyhoura Development CLG in Ireland answers some of our questions about a current project, 'Wild about Ballyhoura's Bats'.

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Stoats and weasels caught on camera



Gareth, a volunteer in Yorkshire, has been monitoring stoats and weasels at a local wetland site, using the 'Mostela'. He shares some of his thoughts about volunteering.

volunteer with Vincent Wildlife Trust in a project that assesses the effectiveness of 'Mostela' camera traps for monitoring stoats and weasels in the UK. This part of the project is taking place at North Cave Wetlands, which is a Yorkshire Wildlife Trust nature reserve in East Yorkshire.

Prior to volunteering with VWT, I was also a volunteer ranger for

the YWT while studying for my Bachelor's degree. It's been great as I've been able to get out and check on the traps in my spare time and, afterwards, I can do my ranger duties for YWT. So, in a day's work, I get to help out two fantastic organisations! While studying, I have been working in a coffee shop, so it's great being a part of this project and to be able to get out and do something positive for British conservation, and to get experience for the career I hope to have.

I check the Mostelas once or twice per week, depending on my available time. This means going out on the reserve and making sure the cameras are all charged up and swapping over the SD cards. I could leave the cameras longer between visits, but I like making sure they're safe – I also get really excited to see what data might have been collected over the week. The results from this project will be really helpful for the conservation of our smaller mustelids and, as a non-



The first stoat captured on camera using a Mostela in Britain

invasive way of getting population estimates, it is better for the wildlife. It is also far less resource-heavy than other methods such as the traditional 'capture and release' methods of surveying.

As the project has gone along, there have been a few surprises that show how much potential this method has in other applications. Having captured video footage of grass snakes, the method could be promising for reptile camera trapping, which still lacks an accepted 'best approach'. We've also had American mink visit the Mostelas. Again, this is a less labour-intensive method of confirming mink presence for organisations concerned with invasive, non-native species.

I found out about this opportunity through attending the 7th Annual Mammal Society Student Conference, where Vincent Wildlife Trust held a training workshop. This was a great weekend and the workshop was fantastic! I was very lucky as VWT's Mustelid Conservation Officer, Lizzie Croose, mentioned the project during the workshop and it just so happened that stoats and weasels are frequently sighted on the reserve that I volunteer at. Speaking of stoats, the stand-out highlight for me so far was definitely getting the first video footage in Britain of a stoat using one of the Mostelas.

This was a brilliant and exciting thing to be a part of, and I'm hoping that this success will continue for the remaining duration of the project, and that I'm able to continue helping to collect such valuable conservation and species data.



The Mostela is a detection device, designed by Jeroen Mos of the Dutch Small Mustelid Foundation. It consists of a wooden box with a plastic tube running through it, with a camera trap housed opposite to record footage of any animals that enter. It has been used successfully to detect weasels, stoats and the occasional polecat in the Netherlands.

Putting the Mostela in a suitable habitat, such as a log pile, will increase the chance of capturing stoats and weasels on camera

For anyone thinking about volunteering with Vincent Wildlife Trust, I would whole-heartedly encourage them to do so. There are so many reasons to do it, whether it's being outdoors or using your time to do something more rewarding than watching TV. Ultimately, the way I see it is that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) rely heavily on volunteers giving their time where they can, and so it will always be useful and appreciated.



Being a key part of a conservation project has given me a sense of pride and achievement that very few other things can equal. I look forward to continuing my volunteering with Vincent Wildlife Trust and I hope to see lots of others involved in the future.

Gareth Dowle
VWT Volunteer

You can read more about stoats, weasels and the use of Mostelas on VWT's website: www.vwt.org.uk

You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for news and updates of our projects.



A grass snake ventured in to inspect the Mostela

Picture Perfect

Much of Vincent Wildlife Trust's most exciting footage comes from our volunteers, who share their time and efforts across all of our project sites: from the green fields and rolling hills of Ireland and Wales to the furthest reaches of England, in the woodlands of Northumberland and stretching down to our most southerly project sites in Devon and Dorset.

Here are some of the highlights from 2018 so far, all beautifully captured on trail cameras in the field by some of VWT's volunteers.



Clockwise from left to right:

Pine marten and a pear; it seems they will eat anything
Julie, Pine Marten Recovery Project, Pantperthog

Two curious fallow deer checking out the trail camera
Matt, Pine Marten Recovery Project, Coed Y Brenin

A grass snake seeking shelter in a Mostela
Gareth, Stoat and Weasel Project, Yorkshire

Stoat steals an egg left out for the pine martens
Ben, Pine Marten Recovery Project, Ynys Hir



Clockwise from bottom left to right:

A badger raids some pine marten bait
Naomi, Pine Marten Recovery Project, Ynys Hir

The apricot bib of a pine marten shows up well on camera
Matt, Pine Marten Recovery Project, Snowdonia

A bold and beautiful buzzard fills the screen
Pine Marten Recovery Project, Hafod Estate

This weasel is having fun in a Mostela... smile for the camera
Gareth, Stoat and Weasel Project, Yorkshire

We would love to see more of your photographs from the field. If you would like your VWT volunteering photographs to feature in the next newsletter, please send them to Gemma, at gemmafisher@vwt.org.uk

Volunteering – bridging the gap between education and conservation



Lewis has been volunteering on VWT's Back from the Brink (BftB) Pine Marten project in the north of England since 2017. As a Countryside Management student at Newcastle University, Lewis's involvement in volunteering with VWT allows opportunities to build theoretical knowledge in addition to developing practical conservation skills and techniques.

I am currently in my final year at Newcastle University, studying Countryside Management. This is a practical, hands-on course that offers a career development module, aimed at gaining experience to benefit future career aspirations. Choosing this module allowed me to work with Vincent Wildlife Trust's Pine Marten Project Officer, Kevin O'Hara.

The Back from the Brink (BftB) Pine Marten Project plays a major role in protecting one of Britain's rarest species, which relates directly to my course and future career in conservation.

My university timetable allowed me to spend days in Kielder Forest, which was obviously a nice change from lectures! The exciting days always started with a good laugh in the car with Kevin on the way up to Kielder. Once there, our aim was to try and catch a pine marten on a camera trap in areas of the forest where we had previously found scats.



Collecting scats is an important way to locate where pine martens are in a woodland

We deployed four cameras in four different areas of the forest within typical-looking pine marten habitats. On each trip to the forest, usually every three weeks, we changed and eagerly checked the SD cards for any pine marten

activity. Unfortunately our cameras didn't show any... however, they recorded some great footage of foxes and deer!

In March, another camera placed in a different location by another volunteer managed to record a pine marten. This first record proves their return to the forest.



Being out in the field puts a practical slant on a conservation course... and makes a nice change from lectures

The next steps are to install artificial den boxes to provide resting and breeding sites to enhance habitats.

“The highlight of my time with the project has to be the experience I have gained.”

Working with Kevin and Vincent Wildlife Trust has allowed me to gain first-hand experience in various conservation methods and techniques, which has enhanced my studies within several modules. I have learnt a great deal about the history, biology and behaviour of the species from Kevin and our time in Kielder Forest. This, coupled with the experience of maintaining good working relationships with other project stakeholders, has jumpstarted my career after university.



Trail cameras are set in the hope of capturing footage of a pine marten

The highlight of my time with the project has to be the experience I have gained. The video footage of the species wasn't too bad, either!

Lewis Pemberton
VWT Volunteer

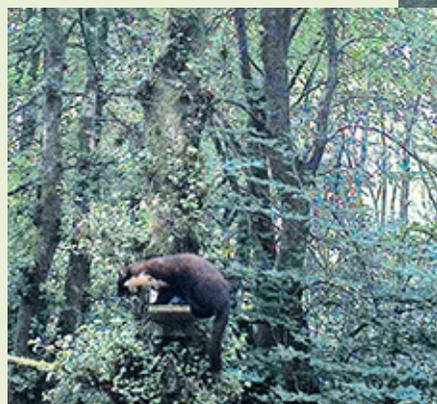
Read more about pine martens in the north of England on VWT's website www.vwt.org.uk

Two firsts for pine martens in the North

It's been an exciting year for confirming the presence of pine martens in Northumberland and in Cumbria, as part of our Back from the Brink project.

Thanks to the massive efforts of our volunteers, who have been regularly setting up trail cameras and scanning hours of video footage, we have had the first confirmed sighting of pine martens in Northumberland and Cumbria.

The first record of a pine marten caught on camera in Kershope Forest, Cumbria



The first colour footage of a pine marten in Northumberland



Frank Greenaway

Wild about Ballyhoura's Bats Q&A



BALLYHOURA
DEVELOPMENT CLG

Rhiannon Laubach, Rural Social Scheme Team Leader with Ballyhoura Development CLG in Ireland, explains how the 'Wild about Ballyhoura's Bats' project, which is a community-led initiative, has helped to survey and monitor lesser horseshoe bats.

Q What is the Ballyhoura Development CLG?

A Ballyhoura Development is a local development company in the North Cork East Limerick area. The catchment is predominantly rural, but does contain some larger market towns. The company facilitates

opportunities for people to participate in their local community and provides support to a range of community groups.

We work with geographical communities and with communities of interest (groups focused on particular themes) by supporting them to build their group capacity through mentoring, technical advice, training and development support. All this is aimed at helping to design and deliver services that meet different local needs.

All of our work is based around six areas: Enterprise and Employment; Life Long Learning; Community Development; Children, Family and Wellbeing; Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Recreation, and Environmental Sustainability.

Q How have you and Ballyhoura Development worked with Vincent Wildlife Trust so far, and how did this opportunity come about?

A Vincent Wildlife Trust worked with Ballyhoura by providing two workshops for the communities in our catchment area. One workshop provided training on how to use hand-held bat detectors, and the second workshop provided training on

how to use static detectors. It also featured more information about the rare lesser horseshoe bat. A further talk was delivered on Halloween night in the Lough Gur Heritage Centre.

The opportunity for us to work with VWT is a follow-up to previous events, including bat lectures and our being a partner with the Trust in the development of a proposal for an agri-environmental project during 2017. This project was funded under the Heritage Council's 2018 Funding Scheme, the theme of which was to celebrate the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

Q Who is involved with the project?

A Landowners, community groups, TidyTowns groups, as well as interested members of the public.

Q Why is it important for the local community to get involved in this?

A Bat surveys are usually conducted by professional bat consultants or by members of wildlife organisations who have received training. Yet many people

living in small rural communities are also very interested in knowing about the bats living in their areas.

As a result of this project, they have both the training and the equipment to conduct their own bat surveys. Bats are a protected species that are often much maligned, so this project is an opportunity to give them a better image. It is also an opportunity for TidyTown groups to get actively involved in conservation at a local level. For example, if bats are recorded using a local park, the TidyTown Committee can alter any proposed landscape planning to incorporate those features that are important to the bats.

Q Have there been any particular highlights of the project for you so far?

A Community groups learning how to use bat detectors in order to find out which areas of their villages are important to bats, and then thinking about why bats can only be seen in certain areas.

One example of this involves a group who discovered that bats were only present in the part of the park that had no lighting and was left mostly undisturbed. This started a debate within the group about which other areas could be managed in a more wildlife-friendly way.

All in all, there have been various benefits to working with VWT, and it has given us access to very knowledgeable staff who have the ability to make some of the complex aspects of bat detecting understandable to beginners.

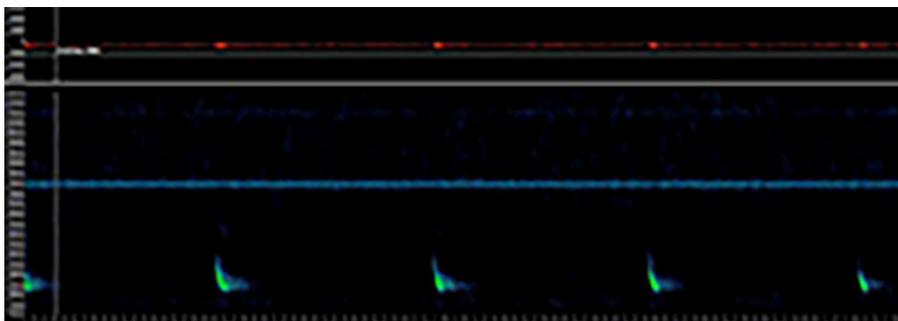


VWT's Dr Kate McAney running a training workshop as part of the 'Wild about Ballyhoura's Bats' project



As a result of training in the use of bat detectors, members of the local community are engaging in bat monitoring projects, which is also leading to the development of wildlife-friendly areas (above)

Different species of bats have different calls, which are displayed on bat detectors by their varied frequency, duration and shape (below)



If you would like to find out more and get involved in the 'Wild about Ballyhoura's Bats' project, please contact Rhiannon at rlaubach@ballyhoura.org 087-1940608

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