



Policy, People and Pine Martens

The Welsh Policy Group (WPG) policy training entitled 'Policy, People and Pine Martens' was hosted jointly with the [Vincent Wildlife Trust \(VWT\)](#).



Background for WPG policy training

WPG policy training supports the [BES WPG's Vision and Strategy 2022-2025](#) in providing a space for ecologists and policy makers to come together and strengthen policy knowledge in the academic community. This training event was held in mid-Wales as part of the BES WPG commitment to spreading events across Wales.

The event was attended by 40 people. Attendees included undergraduate and postgraduate students, practitioners from consultancies, local government, eNGOs, Natural Resources Wales, and the local community of Devil's Bridge.

Conservation translocation and pine martens

[Dr Jenny MacPherson](#), Principal Scientist at the VWT, gave an overview of their Pine Marten Recovery Project. Pine martens in Scotland benefitted from changes in land use as a result of the First and Second World Wars, and [gained legal protections in the 1980s](#) – by 2014, a [Scottish Natural Heritage report](#) demonstrated that pine martens were distributed across Scotland and into neighboring northern England. However, the pine marten population of Wales was not recovering as well. After a [feasibility study](#), 51 pine martens were released into mid-Wales. The success of this translocation project fed into the VWT's updated '[Long-term strategic recovery plan for pine martens in Britain](#)'. This plan seeks to protect existing populations, promote natural recolonisation, and prioritise species restoration in suitable areas for pine martens (so that failure rates of translocated animals are low).

[Dr MacPherson](#) outlined the legislation and policy guidelines that are relevant to conservation translocation and specifically to pine martens. Pine martens are listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), affording them the highest level of protection, but are not listed on Schedule 9, which lists species that are illegal to release into the wild in the UK. [Pine martens are listed as Least Concern](#) on the ICUN Red List, but are rare in Wales and England.

Good knowledge of the animal and its needs is important. For example, pine martens need large, well connected forested regions, and they eat small mammals (such as voles and shrews), as well as invertebrates and berries (however, there is evidence they'll eat jam tarts if they can get their paws on them!).

It was highlighted that once a translocation is recommended (i.e. because encouragement of natural recolonisation is not successful), the first step is to talk to the local community who will be affected. What do they know about pine martens? Have they seen pine martens in the area in the past? Have they seen evidence (spoor/scats) of pine martens? How do they feel about pine martens and the potential translocation of them to the area? Only after community engagement has happened, can you move to the next step, which is focused on logistics involving field surveys for potential prey, habitat risk assessments, disease risk analyses, and so on. Subsequently, conservation translocation can take place. In the example of the [pine marten in mid-Wales](#), 51 animals of breeding age were translocated from Scotland to Wales and radio tracked.

Imagining our own policies, and evaluating their effectiveness

For the remainder of the morning, participants split into groups and became 'policy makers', deliberating the current relevant legislation and policy covering conservation translocation of pine martens in Wales. Discussions involved the following questions:

Is the current legislation and guidance too prescriptive? Or is it not detailed enough? What parts of the [Wildlife and Countryside Act \(1981\)](#) are relevant? Are pine martens considered native in Wales? Does this classification differ across the UK? What is the reasoning behind which species are on [Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act \(1981\)](#)? Is guidance on post-release monitoring extensive enough?



Groups of attendees deliberating legislation and policy

The final activity of the morning brought all the attendees back together into a lively debate between groups, as they scrutinised each other's suggestions through the lenses of a variety of stakeholders (e.g. 'guerilla' rewilders, local community, livestock owners). The participants received the following summary of the priorities and concerns of each category of stakeholders:

Stakeholder	What are your priorities and concerns?
'Guerilla' rewilders	You believe that translocations and reintroductions are vital for restarting natural processes and that species should be helped to move in the face of climate change. If it is not possible to do this legally, you may do it illegally.
Local community	You love the landscape and nature of the area that you live in and are cautious of change. You aren't automatically hostile to translocations, but would like to know the justification, as well as potential advantages and disadvantages.
Livestock farmers	You live and work in the landscape and know it very well. Similar to the local community, but you have the added concern of impacts on your livestock.
Vincent Wildlife Trust	You believe that translocations are important, but should be done using methods that are sound ecologically and in terms of animal welfare. It would be helpful if funding and resources were available to help with actions such as monitoring.

It was quickly apparent that each group had different priorities and concerns about conservation translocation. The 'guerilla' rewilders group stressed that time is of the essence when restoring native species, and in many cases felt that we need to move faster than is possible with existing policy. They understood the need to communicate translocations with local communities but suggested that timelines be set so that progress isn't slowed by a few people who aren't onboard. Meanwhile, the group representing the local community emphasised that they were looking to be fully engaged in the project through codesign, rather than just told what is happening once it has already been decided. They wanted to be included in conversations as early as possible, and to take on a consultation role – this, they noted, would be beneficial to getting the word out as far and wide as feasible, so that everyone who will be affected has an opportunity to engage. One concern mentioned was the safety of pets, and the need to educate and empower the local community with knowledge about the proposed translocated species (with reassurance for their pets).

Through the lens of livestock farmers, attendees highlighted that it's important to consider the concerns of livestock welfare. Even though pine martens are of very minimal threat to cows, they may occasionally harm other types of smaller livestock. Attendees playing the role of farmers suggested to allocate some funding to compensate for livestock injury. This group saw that improving biodiversity on their land and surrounding areas would be a positive change.

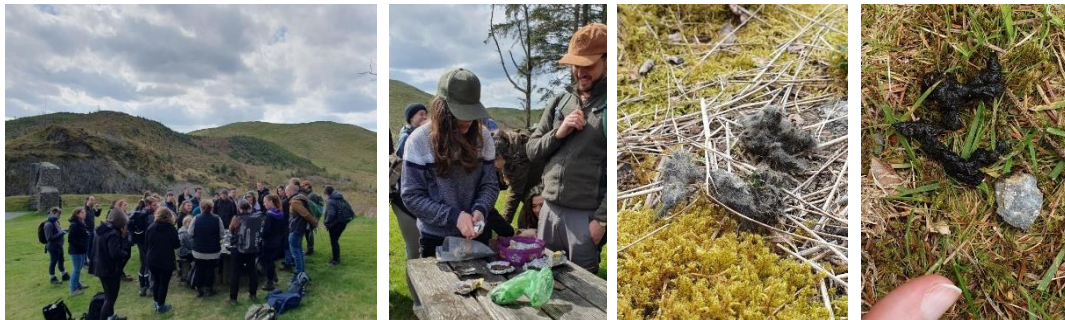


Attendees discussing the needs of their stakeholders

The key thread through this discussion was communication – people want to know what is happening and why, throughout and after the project. It was stressed by many in the discussion that this communication should be accessible to all and published both in Welsh and English. They agreed that social media and online communication could be very important for reaching disparate communities in rural Wales, but they couldn't be the only method used, as internet access and use varies across the country.

Into the Welsh sunshine for pine marten tracking

After a break for lunch in the sunshine, participants ventured to the site of the VWT's reintroduction of pine martens in mid-Wales. Jenny from the VWT and Josie Bridges (previous Field Assistant and Project Officer of the VWT Pine Marten project) gave a brief history of the project and passed around a used tracking collar and a mold of a spoor (track) to give an idea of the size of the animals. A pine marten sighting was unlikely (they are nocturnal), so Josie and Jenny pointed out the hollows in trees that pine martens may use as a den and laid out examples of scat to give an idea of what size, colour and consistency to look out for.



Photos of the group learning about the Pine Marten Recovery Project; examples of scat from various mammals; springtime scat full of rabbit fur; and fresh pine marten scat

The group took a walk on a path through forest and clearings; all with eyes glued to the ground for scat or up on the tree trunks for hollows. Each time a scat was spotted on the path or a nearby tree stump, the group excitedly gathered to see if they could identify what animal had left the evidence. When fresh pine marten scat was found along the path, members of the group waited in turn to get their noses to the ground to confirm the “pine marten scat scent”.

Further reading

- [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#)
- [Environment \(Wales\) Act 2016](#)
- [Duty 6 \(DECCA\) of the Environment Act](#)
- [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#)
- [VWT Pine Marten Recovery Projects](#)