

## People & Pine Marten in Wales: Public Opinion Survey 2013

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### Introduction

The pine marten is a native mammal and was once common throughout forested areas in Britain, before experiencing a prolonged decline. This was predominantly due to habitat loss, fragmentation, and human persecution. Though the Scottish and Irish populations have begun to recover following legal protection, the populations in Wales and England are failing to do so, and if anything, appear to be edging towards extinction.

Following extensive survey work and research in Wales over a twenty year period, The Vincent Wildlife Trust has decided that the only way there will be a recovery of the pine marten in Wales is through active intervention; reinforcing the existing population. This type of work cannot succeed without public support and participation. To investigate whether a restocking would be publicly supported, a public opinion survey was launched in the spring of 2013. 7500 Surveys were mailed out to rural households in areas where there had been a recent history of pine marten occurrence, as well as a number of other rural locations. The survey was also 'activated' online, and links to the survey were shared through collaborative organisations. In addition to those two methods, responses were also collected as part of a pine marten 'Road Show', which travelled round Co-operative stores, raising awareness of our work.

The survey yielded 871 viable responses; 372 by mail, 245 from the weblink and 254 from the roadshows. The results are presented below.

### Attitudes to biodiversity

- Overall, 42% of respondents had given a great deal of thought to the loss of biodiversity in the UK, while a further 36% had given it a fair amount of thought.

### Knowledge of pine martens

- Overall, 91.9%, or one in ten respondents had heard of pine martens.
- 46.6% of respondents had heard of pine martens from TV programmes. This was followed by education/learning, and then magazines or newsletters, demonstrating the potential role that popular media can play in raising awareness of environmental issues.

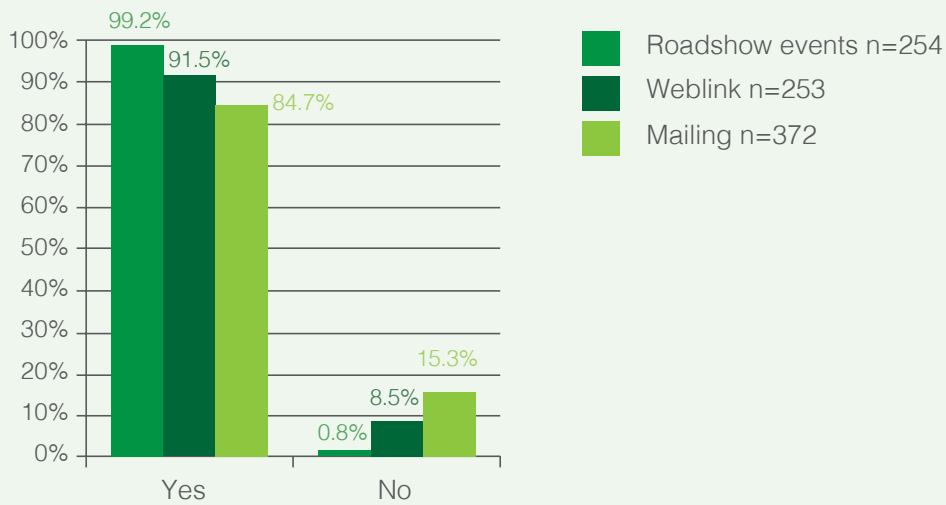
### Pine martens and the threat of extinction

- 75% of respondents stated that it was very important to them that the pine marten did not go extinct, and an additional 20% thought it was important that they did not.

### Restocking pine martens

- 90.9% of respondents indicated that they would support a restocking (Fig 1).

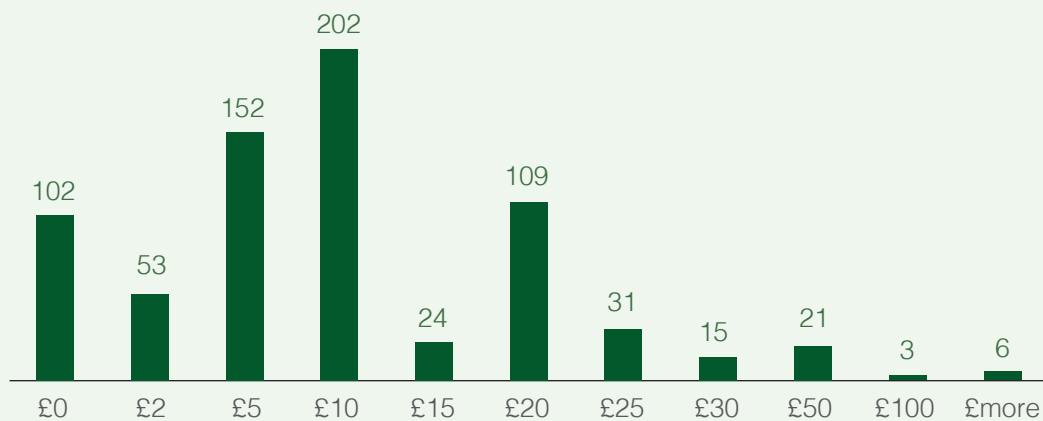
Graph 7a - Showing if respondents would support the recovery of pine martens in Wales by restocking to increase their numbers (Q7) *Spring Surveys 2013*



**Fig 1:** Support for a restocking, broken down by response method (mailing, weblink or roadshow).

- Overall, just over 70% of respondents were willing to pay at least £13.96 towards a pine marten restocking (**Fig 2**). Zero bids were not included in the averaging, and were interpreted in the main as showing support for a restocking but without contributing financially.

Graph showing the maximum respondents were prepared to pay to support pine marten restocking in Wales (n=718) *The Vincent Wildlife Trust Surveys 2013*



**Fig 2:** Amounts (£) that respondents were willing to pay for a pine marten restocking in Wales.

- 84.5% of respondents gave reasons why they would support a restocking. The number one reason was that the pine marten is a native Welsh animal (**Table 1**).
- 7.3% of respondents gave reasons why they would not support a restocking; the top reason was the threat to other wildlife (**Table 2**). Just six respondents were willing to pay to prevent a restocking.

Table showing why respondents were in favour of restocking pine martens in Wales (Q9) <i>The Vincent Wildlife Trust Surveys 2013</i>		
REASONS FOR RESTOCKING	COUNT	PERCENT
They are a native species	168	22.6%
Increase biodiversity	129	17.3%
Prevent extinction	111	14.9%
Restore natural balance	72	9.7%
General support for wildlife/conservation	60	8.1%
Duty/moral obligation	41	5.5%
For the next generation	23	3.1%
Grey squirrel/pest control	22	3.0%
Wish to see them in the wild	20	2.7%
Economic benefits	14	1.9%
Other	85	11.4%
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>745</b>	<b>100%</b>

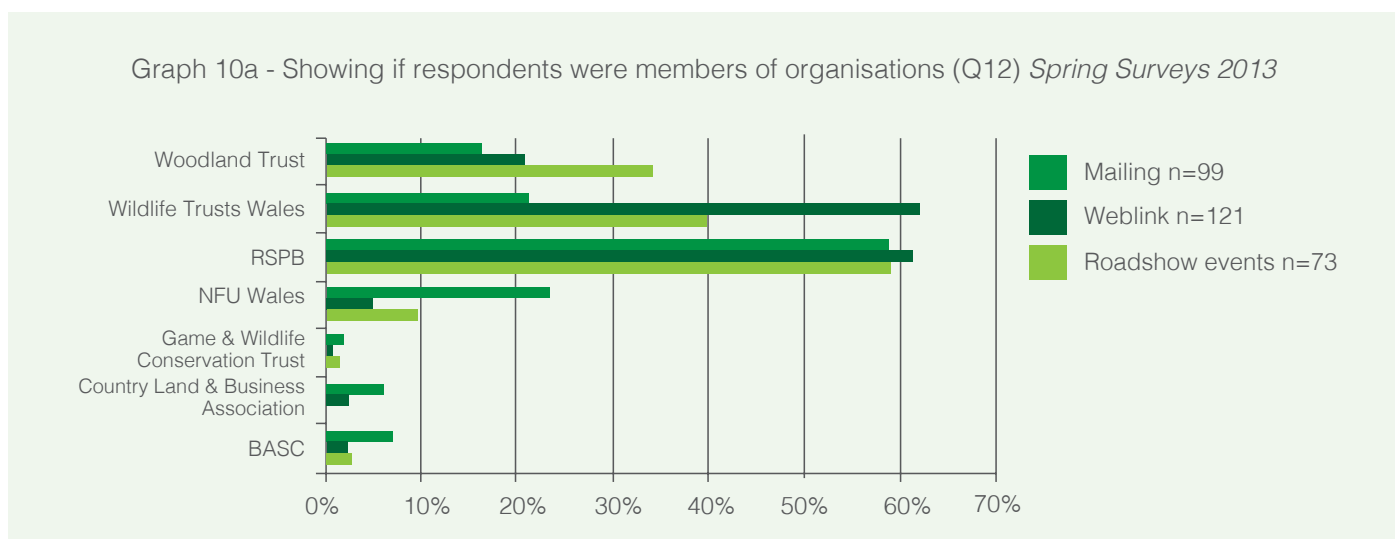
**Table 1:** Reasons for support of a pine marten restocking in Wales given by respondents, categorised and ranked by the frequency of citations.

Table showing why respondents were against restocking pine martens in Wales (Q9) <i>The Vincent Wildlife Trust Surveys 2013</i>		
REASONS AGAINST RESTOCKING	COUNT	PERCENT
Predation of wildlife	15	23.4%
Encouragement of native stock	9	14.1%
Lack of sustainable habitat/fragmentation	8	12.5%
Lack of knowledge about existing population	8	12.5%
Economic costs	6	9.4%
Let nature take its course	4	6.3%
Effect on native gene-pool	4	6.3%
Other	10	15.6%
<b>SUBTOTAL</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100%</b>

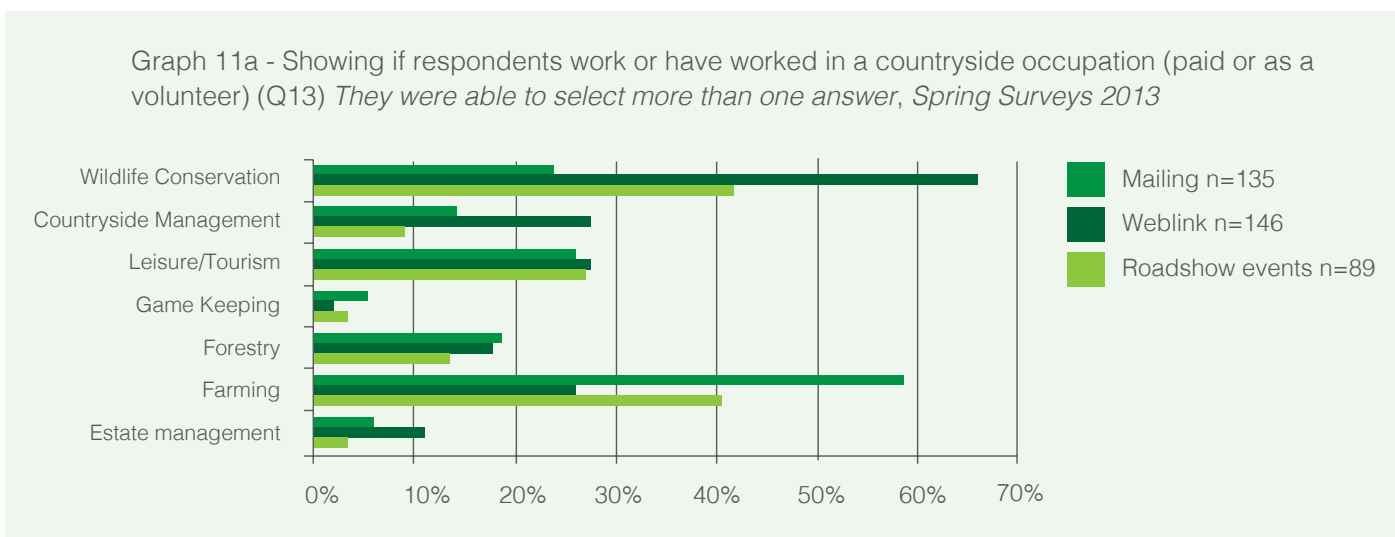
**Table 2:** Reasons given against support of a pine marten restocking in Wales, categorised and ranked by the frequency of citations.

## Organisation membership & countryside occupation

- 26.4% of mailing, 28.7% of roadshow and 49.4% of weblink respondents gave information on organisation membership.
- There was a bias towards conservation organisation membership for the weblink respondents as a result of the online survey being promoted mainly by conservation friendly organisations. 62% of weblink respondents had Wildlife Trust membership, compared to 40% of roadshow and 20% of mailing respondents (**Fig 3**).
- The second largest membership for mailing respondents was the National Farmers Union (NFU).



**Fig 3:** Graph showing organisation membership, broken down by response type (mailing, weblink or roadshow).



**Fig 4:** Countryside occupations for respondents, broken down into response type (mailing, weblink or roadshow).

- Members of conservation organisations were most likely to support a restocking, and members of the Country Land Association (CLA) & British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) were most likely to oppose a restocking.
- Though CLA and BASC members were most likely not to support a restocking, the ratio of support to non-support was still 2:1 for both.
- Respondents who worked in estate management and leisure & tourism were most likely to support a restocking, whilst gamekeepers, farmers and countryside managers were least likely to provide support.

## Summary

Social acceptance is a major factor in the process of re-establishing lost or endangered species.

The majority of respondents to the survey would support a restocking, and were willing to pay an average £14 to see it happen; this is very encouraging when treated within the framework of an economy that is still recovering from the collapse of 2008. The overall perception of importance for the work was demonstrated by the proportion of respondents who stated that it was either very important or important to prevent the pine martens extinction in Wales (75% & 20% respectively). This was further reinforced by the reasons cited for support, with the top three reasons being 1) their native status, 2) that they contribute to biodiversity, and 3) that it is important to prevent their extinction. The majority support for an animal with native status highlights the value that people attribute to indigenous species, or species that 'belong' in that country, and which have a historical presence, traceable through hunting records and folklore.

The stand out reason for not support a restocking was predation of other wildlife, and the threat to small birds, eggs/nestlings and red squirrels in particular. Concern for red squirrels is perhaps attributable to misinformation; dietary studies in Britain and Ireland indicate that red squirrels comprise a relatively small proportion of pine marten diet, and the two species have co-evolved for thousands of years in Britain. There is increasing evidence, particularly from Dr Emma Sheehy's work in Ireland, demonstrating that red squirrels actually benefit from pine marten presence. This is a result of pine martens reducing the numbers of grey squirrels, which carry and transmit the squirrel parapox virus to reds - a much greater threat than pine marten predation.

The influential role of popular media was highlighted by the number of people that had heard of pine martens primarily through television programmes and magazines. Acceptance of the pine marten needs to be achieved at the community level if any reinforcement is to succeed, and utilising media will be a key part of this strategy. It was perhaps unsurprising that a restocking would receive most support from those that work in leisure and tourism and conservation, and least support from gamekeepers, farmers and countryside managers. Any campaign to raise awareness and support for a restocking will obviously have to be targeted mainly at these groups, with education, and a history of evidence based on research, the most powerful tools we have at our disposal. It is this research, and evidence from elsewhere in Britain, that we can call upon to answer some of the other key misgivings about a restocking; is there suitable habitat?; why not focus on the existing population?; is enough known about pine marten ecology?. These issues have been addressed, though one conclusion from this survey is that the strategy for disseminating this information needs to be optimised.

In summary, the majority of respondents would support a restocking, and would like to see the recovery of the pine marten in Wales. With this initial public engagement work demonstrating such a positive attitude to pine martens and the prospect of a restocking, we can proceed with confidence and a better understanding of where further community engagement work needs to be focussed in the near future, and then continually through the early years of the pine marten recovery project.

## Acknowledgements

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