

TECHNICAL OFFICERS'
WORKING PARTY REPORT

WYE VALLEY AONB
JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE
6th March 2017

PINE MARTEN REINTRODUCTION FEASIBILITY STUDY

Purpose

To receive a presentation on the two year feasibility study into whether pine martens should be reintroduced to the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley.

FOR INFORMATION

Key Issues

- Pine martens are one of Britain's rarest mammals, and are predominantly restricted to Scotland with low numbers in Wales and South Shropshire.
- Once common across England, they were hunted to extinction in the country during the 1800s.
- In summer 2016 investigations began into the feasibility of reintroducing pine martens to the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley as part of a collaborative project between Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, The Vincent Wildlife Trust, and the Forestry Commission.
- No decision on the reintroduction of pine martens to the area will be made before Spring 2018.
- Andrew Stringer, Pine Marten Project Manager, will give a brief presentation on the project, what is planned for the feasibility study, and where it has got to so far.

Reasons

Pine martens are housecat-sized members of the stoat and weasel family. They are generalist omnivores and living at low density (1 per 100ha is considered high density), being very mobile, easily travelling 20km in a day. Pine martens are dependent on woodland habitat offering plenty of food and denning potential. There is a population of at least 4,000 pine martens in Scotland and they are known to exist in Wales. In 2015 the first ever photograph of a wild pine marten in Shropshire was taken in the Clun Valley. Shropshire now has the only known breeding population of pine martens in England.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, in collaboration with the Forestry Commission and The Vincent Wildlife Trust are running a two year feasibility study into whether pine martens should be reintroduced to the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley.

Implications

The feasibility study commenced in June 2016 and is looking into all aspects of pine marten biology, how they will affect local ecosystems, and the impacts and opportunities they may

provide for people living alongside them. The study will be fully assessing the issues, and the reintroduction will not go ahead if the costs clearly outweigh the benefits.

The project utilises key international guidelines on reintroductions, and aims to assess the costs and benefits of a reintroduction within three key areas:

Biological feasibility: This assesses the suitability of habitat, including the abundance of food, dens sites, and potential sources of mortality. This will be used to predict whether a stable population of pine martens can live in the Forest of Dean and Wye Valley area.

Ecological feasibility: This will address the potential costs and benefits to the ecology of the area, should a native omnivore be reintroduced. There is the potential for the reintroduction to have a variety of benefits, such as a controlling effect on grey squirrel populations, but we also need to fully assess the risk to species that are rare and protected.

Socio-economic feasibility: This will assess the social costs and benefits of a reintroduction. Benefits may include an opportunity to increase ecotourism to the area. On the other hand, we know that pine martens pose a threat to domestic birds such as pheasants and chickens. Investigations into how this threat could be mitigated will be carried out.

As part of the feasibility study Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, The Vincent Wildlife Trust, and the Forestry Commission will consult with a wide range of individuals, and are particularly interested in hearing the opinions and concerns from all those who may be affected.

Background

For more information see www.GloucestershireWildlifeTrust.co.uk/PineMarten and / or contact Andrew.Stringer@GloucestershireWildlifeTrust.co.uk