

Shropshire Pine Marten report 2024-25

Shropshire Hills National Landscape grant

Author: Stuart Edmunds

Aims of the project during the grant period

The objective of this project for the 12-month period April 2024 to April 2025 was to develop further monitoring hubs for the population of pine martens in Shropshire and determine their geographic distribution. As martens have been recorded on an estate at the southern edge of the Stiperstones, it was planned that further woodland blocks at The Bog, Snailbeach and Poles Coppice should be monitored using additional camera traps funded by the grant. To determine whether martens may also be present beyond Church Stretton and along Wenlock Edge, local groups would also be trained in those areas to install and monitor camera traps, reporting back to the project coordinator with any findings.

Cameras installed in the new locations would provide evidence of pine marten presence in those locations. As pine marten population expansion is slow and restricted by the amount of suitable semi-ancient woodland with standing dead wood and tree hollows for dens, den boxes would then be installed in those woodlands. This would offer any individual martens passing through somewhere safe and dry to rest or even rear their young once the breeding season begins.

Continued awareness-raising events would also be organised to educate local communities on the importance of not only pine martens, but the overall need to improve existing habitats and create even more.

Camera trap results

Between 2020 and 2023, 20 camera traps deployed in woodlands near Black Rhadley and Nipstone recorded 76 video clips of at least 4 pine martens inhabiting the area. By the end of 2023, 6 of the camera traps had stopped working and more cameras were purchased thanks to the Conservation Fund grant in April 2024. These were further bolstered by donations of 4 extra camera traps independently. 5 of the previous cameras were left in position in the Black Rhadley area and the remaining functioning cameras were re-deployed in woodlands at The Bog with the permission of 4 landowners. Another camera and den box were installed on the edge of farmland below the Bog Visitor Centre, where a pine marten was reported by the landowner in 2023.

The first marten of 2024 was recorded on the edge of pine woodland at The Bog on 12th April on a camera trap that had been relocated from the Nipstone area. The video was very brief but shows a female marten scent marking. As it is the only evidence recorded for the area, it prompted me to look to other nearby woodland options for further monitoring as it may have been a transient individual in search of a new territory.

Despite the low number of pine marten records, sightings of other mammals were recording, including of goshawk, roe deer, hedgehog, badger, fox, tawny owl and polecats. All data has been collated and added to the county biodiversity database.



1 - 12th April

Martens were then recorded on the 4th May near Nipstone and on 14th August on Shropshire Council land above Snailbeach. Again, both martens appeared to be passing through and left scent to mark the trail.



2- 4th May



3- 14th August

Pine marten records reduced dramatically in 2024, but this is unlikely to be a reflection on the current population. In previous years, there was a clear relationship between the number of camera traps at a location and the number of pine marten videos recorded. Many of the cameras previously deployed in marten “hotspots” were spread out into the wider area with the aim of determining how far spread the local population is, so it was very likely that less martens would be recorded if cameras were used in lower density.

The marten videos highlighted routes that transient martens have used as they search for new areas of woodland with den sites. This has allowed me to identify potential new territory areas and contact new woodland owners to discuss monitoring on their land (more below).

Volunteer and community involvement

In addition to my involvement with the Wheathill Pine Marten project with Sue Crighton, I have coordinated and led several public events, talks and training sessions for prospective volunteers.

Overall, 150 people have attended talks focussing on the project, including a presentation for Friends of Pontesford Hill, Abdon Wildlife Group and for the Local Branch of the RSPB in Diddlebury.

Two sessions were run to train volunteers to check camera traps, learn how to install them and to look for marten field signs at previously unchecked sites. The first was at Snailbeach on 7th July for 8 people and the second on 10th November at Ashes Hollow, which was attended by 18 people. Potential pine marten scat was located in the Hollow, indicating that the area might be used as a corridor for martens passing from one side of the Long Mynd to the other.

On the 7th July, I led a group of Young Rangers, with the help of Joe Penfold, to check on camera traps I installed in the woodlands above Snailbeach a few days before. Although no martens were recorded at this session, the camera traps did record hedgehogs, foxes and roe deer. We also installed a den box in the area to provide shelter for any pine martens that do pass through the woods.

Although the original aim was to train 6 volunteers to check camera traps, over 40 people have attended training sessions, with 5 people confident enough to check camera trap footage at Wards Coppice and Nipstone area. I ran a student introductory session for Shropshire Wildlife Trust volunteers, then a pine marten-themed field visit for 35 pupils from Kinlet and Farlow primary schools at Clunton Coppice (9th July).

In November, I recruited helpers from the Church Stretton branch of the Shropshire Ornithological Society to monitor their own woodland next to Ragleth Wood. The two camera traps in situ there are now regularly checked, and the footage of wildlife is uploaded to a cloud-based storage folder.

As a result of the additional £500 award, I was able to purchase two new camera traps and spend time assessing woodland for the small community wildlife/woodland group in Westhope. This woodland provides a connection from the Clun Valley to Wenlock Edge and has good potential for a pine marten territory if more den boxes can be installed.

In January, I ran a training event for woodland owners of the Small Wood Project at Lower Vessons, Habberley and installed a den box and camera trap there with the hope of verifying a recent pine marten sighting from the area. The group will continue to check the camera trap and keep a closer eye on any passing wildlife.

There is now interest from the Rea Valley Wildlife Group to set up a pine marten monitoring hub around Earl's Hill and Eastridge, incorporating Poles Coppice. I have been invited to present a talk at their AGM in February to increase interest in not only pine martens, but creating more woodland corridors in their community.



4 - Young Rangers at Snailbeach



5 - Pine marten talk audience



6 - Testing the thermal scope at Ashes Hollow



7 - School visit to Clunton Coppice



8 - Potential marten scat discovery at Ashes Hollow



9 - Installing cameras on new land at Nipstone