



2019 All-Ireland Squirrel and Pine Marten Survey Launched

Members of the public are invited to participate in a Citizen Science survey, and record their sightings of red squirrels, grey squirrels and the pine marten

Monday, 11 March, 2019: Zoology researchers from the Ryan Institute in NUI Galway have teamed up with Ulster Wildlife and Vincent Wildlife Trust in seeking to determine the latest distribution of red and grey squirrels and the pine marten in Ireland. The group are inviting members of the public to participate in a Citizen Science survey, and record their sightings of the three mammal species during 2019. The results will allow the team to compare the current status of the animals with previous surveys conducted in 1997, 2007 and 2012.

Since their introduction in 1911, the grey squirrel has spread throughout a large area of the island of Ireland. The red squirrel, although still quite widespread, has disappeared from many forests as a result of competition and disease spread by the greys. In the most recent survey in 2012, however, there were indications that the grey squirrel had been knocked back in certain areas, and this has been attributed to the recovery of another native species, the pine marten.

The pine marten has made a considerable recovery in Ireland, since it became protected under the Irish Wildlife Act of 1976. In the midlands of Ireland, where pine marten densities are highest, grey squirrels have disappeared. It seems the grey squirrels are not able to cope with this predator, either because they are naïve to

the dangers, or are becoming stressed when the pine marten is present. The native red squirrel on the other hand has lived alongside the pine marten for centuries, and although occasionally eaten, they can co-exist quite happily. In fact, with the loss of their competitor the grey squirrel, red squirrel numbers have increased and they have returned to woods where they had previously disappeared.

Dr Colin Lawton from Zoology in the Ryan Institute at NUI Galway explains how the public can help: “We are hoping people all over the island of Ireland will take part in this conservation project. We have seen changes in the ranges of the red and grey squirrel and the pine marten in the previous surveys and it is vital that we keep recording their progress. This is a fascinating story where the recovery of one native species, the pine marten, has slowed the progress of an invasive species, the grey squirrel. The red squirrel, another native species, has shown signs of recovery as a result.”

Dr Lawton added: “By using Citizen Science we can cover the whole island, and benefit from the knowledge and interest of everyone in Ireland. People can upload their animal photos and let us know where they saw the animal, how often they see it and what it was doing.”

Conor McKinney, who is leading on the Red Squirrels United project with Ulster Wildlife, added: “The public is absolutely critical for data collection on this scale and indeed for conservation efforts for red squirrels, pine marten and other species right across the island of Ireland. This is a superb opportunity for people to contribute to exciting new research by uploading their squirrel and pine marten photos and letting us know where they saw the animal, how often they see it and what it was doing.”

Ruth Hanniffy of Vincent Wildlife Trust said: ‘We encourage members of the public to participate in this new Citizen Science survey to document the distribution of two of our native mammals, the pine marten and red squirrel, and that of the non-native grey squirrel. We hope the data collected will help us to better understand the relationships between them.’

This survey is being conducted with the support of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Members of the public can record their sightings using the 2019 All-Ireland Squirrel and Pine Marten Survey pages hosted by the National Biodiversity Data Centre in the Republic of Ireland and CEDaR in Northern Ireland.

More information can be found on the survey Facebook and Twitter pages (both @squirrelsurvey) and the online survey can be found at www.biodiversityireland.ie or <http://www.biodiversityireland.ie/record-biodiversity/surveys/all-ireland-squirrel-and-pine-marten-survey/>.

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For more information, contact Dr Colin Lawton, Zoology, Ryan Institute, NUI Galway at colin.lawton@nuigalway.ie or 091 492335.

Photo.jpg: *Red Squirrel. Photo Credit: L. Croose.*

Photo.jpg: *Pine marten. Photo Credit: R. Cruickshanks.*

Photo.jpg: *Grey squirrel. Photo Credit: J. Warwick*

The Vincent Wildlife Trust

The Vincent Wildlife Trust has been playing a key role in bat conservation in the Republic of Ireland since 1991. The majority of its work has been focused on the bat species in Ireland, and in particular the lesser horseshoe bat. The Trust was responsible for the first all-Ireland otter survey conducted in 1980/81. Since 2011, it has been working on other mammal species including the Irish stoat and the pine marten. Where a need is identified, the Trust will initiate a research programme that will support other bodies working to safeguard the future of all mammals in Ireland.

Read more at: www.vincentwildlife.ie

NUI Galway

NUI Galway was established in the heart of Galway City, on the west coast of Ireland, in 1845. Since then it has advanced knowledge teaching and learning, through research and innovation, and community engagement.

Over 18,000 students study at NUI Galway, where 2,600 staff provide the very best in research-led education.

NUI Galway's teaching and research is recognised through its performance in international rankings. The University is one of the few Irish Universities to have risen in the rankings in four of the last five years including the *Times Higher Education* (THE) World University Rankings and the QS World University Rankings.

With an extensive network of industry, community and academic collaborators around the world, NUI Galway researchers are tackling some of the most pressing issues of our times. Internationally renowned Research Institutes and Centers based here include [CÚRAM Centre for Research in Medical Devices](#), [Insight Centre for Data Analytics](#), [Whitaker Institute for Innovation and Societal Change](#), [Moore Institute](#), [Institute for Life course and Society](#) and [The Ryan Institute for Environment, Marine and Energy](#).

NUI Galway has been listed as one of the most [beautiful universities in Europe](#) according to Business Insider. For more information visit www.nuigalway.ie or view all NUI Galway news [here](#).

*The University's official title is National University of Ireland Galway. Please note that the only official abbreviation is NUI Galway.

Ulster Wildlife and Red Squirrels United

Ulster Wildlife is a local charity that champions native wildlife in Northern Ireland. We work with local people to secure space for nature in our countryside, towns, coastlines and seas. Through our twin visions of Living Landscapes and Living Seas we work to inspire people to champion nature; protect and restore habitats through practical action and research; stand up for nature by influencing government policy; and promote health and well-being through enjoyment of the natural environment. We have over 13,000 members in Northern Ireland who provide vital support for our work. Ulster Wildlife is part of The Wildlife Trusts - a partnership of 47 covering the whole of the UK.

In Northern Ireland, Ulster Wildlife is working with landowners, local communities and local Red Squirrel Groups in four remaining stronghold areas for red squirrels including South Down and the Mourne, Broughshane and Ballygally, Fermanagh, and the North West to help protect these endangered creatures and prevent further spread of invasive non-native grey squirrels through conservation and community engagement activities.

This work is part of Red Squirrels United - the biggest ever partnership of UK organisations working together on a scientifically robust programme of conservation for our iconic red squirrels. The initiative is supported by Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF across the UK) and LIFE14 (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) and by NIEA in Northern Ireland.

Read more at: www.ulsterwildlife.org