



**Mammals in
a Sustainable
Environment**



**OÉ Gaillimh
NUI Galway**

Pine marten scat survey training and trapping demonstration event

The Mammals in a Sustainable Environment (MISE) Project in conjunction with the Irish Squirrel and Pine Marten Project held a pine marten training event at Portlaw Woods, Co. Waterford on Saturday May 5th. Pine marten were trapped over the bank holiday weekend as part of an ongoing study in Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT). The purpose of the trapping was to investigate if the pine marten were breeding and to verify DNA results obtained non-invasively using hair-tubes and scat (faeces) surveys throughout the year. Members of the public were invited to attend the trapping session early on Saturday morning Peter Turner (WIT) demonstrated pine marten trapping (part of a research project at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) (licensed under the National Parks and Wildlife Service). This was a unique opportunity to see one of Ireland's most elusive species. This was followed by a guided walk through the tracks in Portlaw woods where participants learned how to identify signs of marten with members from the MISE team and Emma Sheehy (NUI Galway). This was followed by a light brunch in the Ramada Viking Hotel, Waterford and a series of short talks. Catherine O'Reilly (WIT) spoke about the use of non-invasive DNA technologies in WIT to census the pine marten population in Portlaw over the last number of years. Research at WIT has shown that there is a resident population of marten in the Portlaw area with a number of the offspring dispersing out of the area. A number of scat surveys will take place in surrounding woodlands over the summer to detect any of previously genetically tagged individuals that may now be residing in other woodlands. The Molecular Ecology Research Lab in WIT uses DNA extracted from scats to identify the individual using a DNA fingerprint technique.

Emma Sheehy (NUI Galway) is investigating the effects of pine marten on red and grey squirrel populations and is interested in collecting pine marten scats in areas that contain both species. Red squirrels are native to Ireland but their population has suffered dramatic declines over the last hundred years due to the spread of the grey squirrel, a North American competitor. The grey squirrel was introduced into Castleforbes Co. Longford just over one hundred years ago. The grey squirrel can eventually out-compete the red squirrel due to its larger size and its ability to better digest the available food resources. The red squirrel is also susceptible to squirrel pox virus, a virus which the grey squirrel is immune to but can pass on to the red squirrel causing it to die. Red squirrels were reported to have died from this disease in Dublin earlier this year.





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There is some anecdotal evidence that the presence of pine marten may deter the spread of grey squirrels. It is thought that the bolder grey squirrel spends more time on the ground in comparison to the red squirrel and may be more susceptible to predation by the pine marten. Waterford still has a healthy red squirrel population and it is possible that this may in part be linked to the presence of the pine marten in the county.

It is envisioned that the training provided at this event will allow volunteers to participate in scat surveys during the summer in Waterford and in the midlands to facilitate ongoing studies in the MISE Project, Waterford IT and the Irish Squirrel and Pine Marten Project, NUIG.

For more information about MISE projects visit <http://www.miseproject.ie/> or find us on Facebook. Dates of up-coming events are listed on our website and new dates for pine marten surveys will be added shortly. MISE is a new project funded by the European Regional Development Fund under the Ireland-Wales Programme 2007-2013 (INTERREG IVA). For further information please contact Denise O'Meara, MISE Project Officer, WIT <mailto:domeara@wit.ie> or phone 051302665. For more information about the Irish Squirrel and Pine Marten Project at NUI, Galway visit www.woodlandmammals.com.



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A pine marten released after trapping at Portlaw woods. © Brian Power