

Consultation Title: Pine Marten Translocation – Tweed Valley

Date: 22nd December 2016

To: Professor Xavier Lambin
Room 408
Zoology Building
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From: Karen Ramoo
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Scottish Land & Estates is a member organisation that uniquely represents the interests of both land managers and land-based businesses in rural Scotland. Scottish Land & Estates has members with interests in a great variety of land uses and welcomes the opportunity to respond to request for feedback on the proposed pine marten translocation project in the Tweed Valley, Scottish Borders.

Within Scottish Land & Estates there is a spread of opinion as to the potential benefits of the reintroduction of pine martens for the purpose of reducing grey squirrel numbers. This is perhaps to be expected given the range of land-based activities our members are involved with. For example, those with a major interest in forestry, managing amenity woodlands and red squirrel conservation may well welcome a potential ally in grey squirrel control. Whereas those with commercial or recreational shooting operations or that have an interest in the conservation of ground nesting birds, may have concerns about the long-term consequences for these objectives of enhancing pine marten numbers. Given the range of views expressed by members on the proposal we feel it difficult to provide a response which represents these equally and have therefore, with the agreement of Xavier Lambin opted instead to provide personal statements from those members who have provided comments on the proposal, please find these detailed below.

Colin Strang Steel, Threepwood Estate – Scottish Borders

I remain firmly opposed to the reintroduction of pine martens in the Tweed valley, or anywhere else for that matter.

As we heard from Professor Lambin himself, pine martens are already recolonising Scotland, at their own pace, and probably in accordance with the carrying capacity of the land and the species' own population dynamics. They do not need our help, however attractive the prospect may be for research scientists or "rewilders".

As I asked Professor Lambin at Torwoodlee, has due consideration been given to whether the possible benefits of releasing pine martens are likely to outweigh the undoubted harm they will cause to hard pressed birds, since it is established fact that they will eat ground and tree nesting birds, nestlings and their eggs. ? For example, in Culbin Forest in Morayshire, they have decimated the nest-box nesting population of crested tits there. I have also heard of them taking and eating newly born lambs.

ESI state that they would require some assurance that it would be possible to "control" pine martens if things went wrong. We all know how difficult, if not impossible, it is to obtain a licence to kill a protected species, so it is unrealistic to make this a condition of their release unless their protected status was lifted from the outset.

No answer has been provided as to what the outcome will be for pine martens once they have rid the area of grey squirrels. There has to be an exit strategy agreed before any release can even be considered.

Overall I remain totally unconvinced of the potential benefits arising from the introduction of pine martens when weighed against the destruction which they can inflict on other forms of wildlife and birds in particular.

Angus Pelham, Dess, Aboyne, Aberdeenshire

I have read in Land Business Issue 61 Winter 2016 "With UK Pine Marten populations in recovery, the potential benefits for grey squirrel control, red squirrel conservation ———". I would dispute this very strongly indeed. We had, last winter, a family of Pine Martens in an outside shed. The detritus left behind after they left included many remains of birds and animals including a large number of RED SQUIRRELS of all ages. I know "they say" "a pine marten cannot climb on branches too thin for their weight and able to support red squirrels but this would be exceptional. Pine Martens are ruthless killers and they kill red squirrels, our population reduced by some estimated 60% with the arrival of the Pine Marten. Facts are required.

Martin Andrews, Wemyss and March Estates

Further to our chat yesterday about Pine Martens I would confirm our views about reintroductions.

As you know both Matthew Benson and I attended Xavier's presentation at Torwoodlee. It was very interesting and the suggested links with declining Grey Squirrel numbers quite compelling. We are however concerned that the science is not confirmed beyond doubt and that our red population, which is already stressed, will be put at some risk. The impacts on other species and activities are not clear and could be significant. Clearly more work needs to be done and from this point of view, a further trial can be supported provided suitable and transparent protocols are in place. It is important that Government is involved and has given clear commitments to license action quickly if things go wrong or if other side effects become serious for other species or for local businesses. Ideally, the scientists or those organising the trial will have pre-signed licence agreements from SNH to deal with "rogue" animals so that speedy interaction can be taken if required.

In terms of the EIS response we are broadly aligned but feel their statement needs to be made more robust. Where they support further releases (para 8) we feel this should be

restricted to releases for scientific trial study work only at least until more evidence is gathered and full peer review and further consultations under taken. We agree that illegal releases should not be supported and call on all agencies including scientific bodies to denounce this activity.

Hugh A Nicol, Argyll Estates, Inveraray, Argyll & Bute

May I ask that you suggest that a better place for a translocation may be Edinburgh on three count.

1. The population of Grey Squirrel in the Lothians is very high and Reds have been eliminated. A thinning or removal of the Greys would provide what is clearly an ideal squirrel habitat ready for repopulation by native reds – either natural or by translocation.
2. If the intention is to bring Pine Martin to the Borders to create better habitat for Reds, surely on a national strategic approach, hitting the Greys in their strongholds at the same time would prove to be a better approach to tinkering around the edges while the core population of Greys grows and expands.
3. Much of the enthusiasm for rewilding is based in the cities and this would be both a really fascinating natural and social experiment to take nature, for the right reasons, into an urban/suburban environment. Badgers and Foxes can be found in Edinburgh city boundaries in some numbers so small intelligent Pine Martins should be able to thrive given the food supply and environment available.

James Agnew, Hendersyde, Scottish Borders

Please could you send more detail on the project? We are overrun with grey squirrels and would love some pine martens here!