#### 1 CURRENT STATUS

# 1.1 Legislation and priority status

International Habitats Directive<sup>a</sup> (Annex Va)

Berne Convention (Appendix III)

UK and Wales Habitat Regulations<sup>b</sup> (Schedule 3)

Wildlife and Countryside Act (Schedule 6)
The Wild Mammals Protection Act 1996

SoCC°

Gwynedd Snowdonia BAP

#### 1.2 Status in Wales and beyond

The polecat<sup>d</sup> is expanding its range in Britain, following a drastic decline in the late 1800s. A recent distribution study by the Vincent Wildlife Trust, collecting road casualty data between 1993 and 1997, suggests polecats are now more abundant in England than in Wales<sup>1</sup>. This follows polecat reintroductions in parts of England and Scotland.

#### 1.3 Status in Gwynedde

Historically Gwynedd is a Welsh stronghold for the polecat. Further survey work is needed to accurately define their current distribution within the area, but it appears that they may have a high density in some localities.

# 2. FACTORS AFFECTING THIS SPECIES IN GWYNEDD

- Persecution by gamekeepers and poultry farmers led to a serious decline during the nineteenth century
- Secondary poisoning from eating prey affected by rodenticides
- Road casualties
- High stocking rates and resultant overgrazing has led to reduced cover and den sites
- There is a conflict with game rearing and poultry keeping and accidental trapping in mink control programmes
- Occasional resurgence of rabbit diseases such as myxomatosis reducing prey availability

# 3. ASSOCIATED GWYNEDD SAPS / HAPS

Veteran trees, lowland wood pasture and parkland, Arable field margins, Lowland meadows and pasture, Hedgerows, Transport corridors, Buildings, Maritime cliff and slopes, Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, Coastal sand dunes, River corridors, Wetlands

Pine marten

f See also associated HAPs for more general factors affecting this species habitats



 $<sup>^{</sup>m a}$  Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>b</sup> European Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>c</sup> UK Species of Conservation Concern List

d Mustela putorius

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>e</sup> Within this document the term "Gwynedd" refers to areas outside the Snowdonia National Park area, except where specified otherwise

## 4. CURRENT ACTION IN GWYNEDD

## 4.1 Site and habitat protection

 Polecats may occur in terrestrial or coastal areas of Gwynedd identified as potential Wildlife Sites, or designated as LNR, SSSI, NNR, candidate SAC or SPA, however no details are available.



## 4.2 Management and programmes of action

- A bilingual information leaflet: The Polecat, has been produced by the Vincent Wildlife Trust (1998).
- Grant Schemes for woodland management (e.g. Woodland Grant Scheme) and agrienvironmental management (e.g. Tir Gofal) may contribute towards maintaining and enhancing habitat suitable for the polecat.

### 4.3 Survey, research and monitoring

- A study was carried out during the 1990s concentrating mainly on polecat road casualties
- An abundance monitoring exercise based on polecat road casualties was carried out by Vincent Wildlife Trust during 2002 and continued in 2003
- There is an ongoing national survey programme by the Vincent Wildlife Trust, who also maintain a database of reported polecat sightings

#### 5. ACTION PLAN OBJECTIVES

- 1. To maintain and expand existing populations of the polecat in Gwynedd.
- 2. To improve awareness and tolerance of polecats

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## 6. PROPOSED ACTIONS

Code	Action	Partner(s) <sup>g</sup>
Policy and legislation		
1	Use planning conditions to ensure developments in sensitive locations are compatible with conservation of polecat TARGET / TIMESCALE: Ongoing	<i>GC</i> , Relevant partners
Species / habitat management and protection		
	None identified	
Advisory		
2	Provide advice on exclusion of polecats from game and poultry pens to gamekeepers, farmers and poultry keepers  TARGET/TIMESCALE: on an ad hoc basis, Ongoing	GC, BASC, CCW, DEPC, GCT
Survey, research and monitoring		
3	Assist with the development of polecat survey techniques where appropriate and feasible TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	VWT, CEH, GC, UWB
Communications and publicity		
4	Raise awareness among gamekeepers, farmers, poultry keepers and others who practise predator control of the legal protection afforded to this species, and of the benefits of sound practices of housing poultry and game over lethal polecat control. This to be achieved through publishing regular articles in relevant publications and giving talks to relevant groups (e.g. publications and local meetings of farming unions) TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, BASC, CCW, DEPC, GCT, FWAG Cymru, VWT
5	Encourage the recording of polecat sightings by the general public, to be passed to Vincent Wildlife Trust for collation, through submission of regular press releases to local newspapers, and the provision of detailed advice on request TARGET/TIMESCALE: Ongoing	GC, NWWT, VWT

# 7. PARTNERS & OPPORTUNITIES

## 7.1 Overall Lead Partner for Action Plan

Vincent Wildlife Trust (VWT)

# 7.2 Key partners

British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC)

Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH)

Countryside Council for Wales (CCW)

Department for Environment, Planning and Countryside (Welsh Assembly Government) (DEPC)

Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group Cymru (FWAG Cymru)

Game Conservancy Trust (GCT)

Gwynedd Council (GC)

<sup>9</sup> Lead partner for this action is indicated by bold typeface, see section 7.2 for explanation of abbreviations



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North Wales Wildlife Trust (NWWT)

University of Wales Bangor (UWB)

### 7.3 Opportunities

Volunteers, students, farming unions, landowners and managers, gamekeepers, poultry keepers

# 8 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## 9. ABBREVIATIONS

BAP: Biodiversity Action Plan, HAP: Habitat Action Plan, JNCC: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, LBAP: Local Biodiversity Action Plan, LNR: Local Nature Reserve, NNR: National Nature Reserve, SAC: Special Area of Conservation, SAP: Species Action Plan, SPA: Special Protection Area, SSSI: Site of Special Scientific Interest

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Birks, J.D.S. and Macmillan, H.J. 2001. *The Vincent Wildlife Trust - Review of 1997 - 2000.* The Vincent Wildlife Trust.

 $<sup>^2</sup>$  Birks & Kitchener, 1999. The Distribution and Status of the Polecat in Britain in the 1990's, The Vincent Wildlife Trust.