



# The National Polecat Survey

The Vincent Wildlife Trust's national polecat survey began in January 2014 with the aim of gathering up-to-date information on the distribution of the polecat in Britain.

## Patterns of records received

A total of 775 records of polecats and polecat-type animals were received between January and December 2014. The majority of records received have been road casualties, followed by live sightings, with a smaller proportion of records from animals caught in live traps, on camera traps and animals found dead (not obvious road casualties) (see Figure 1).

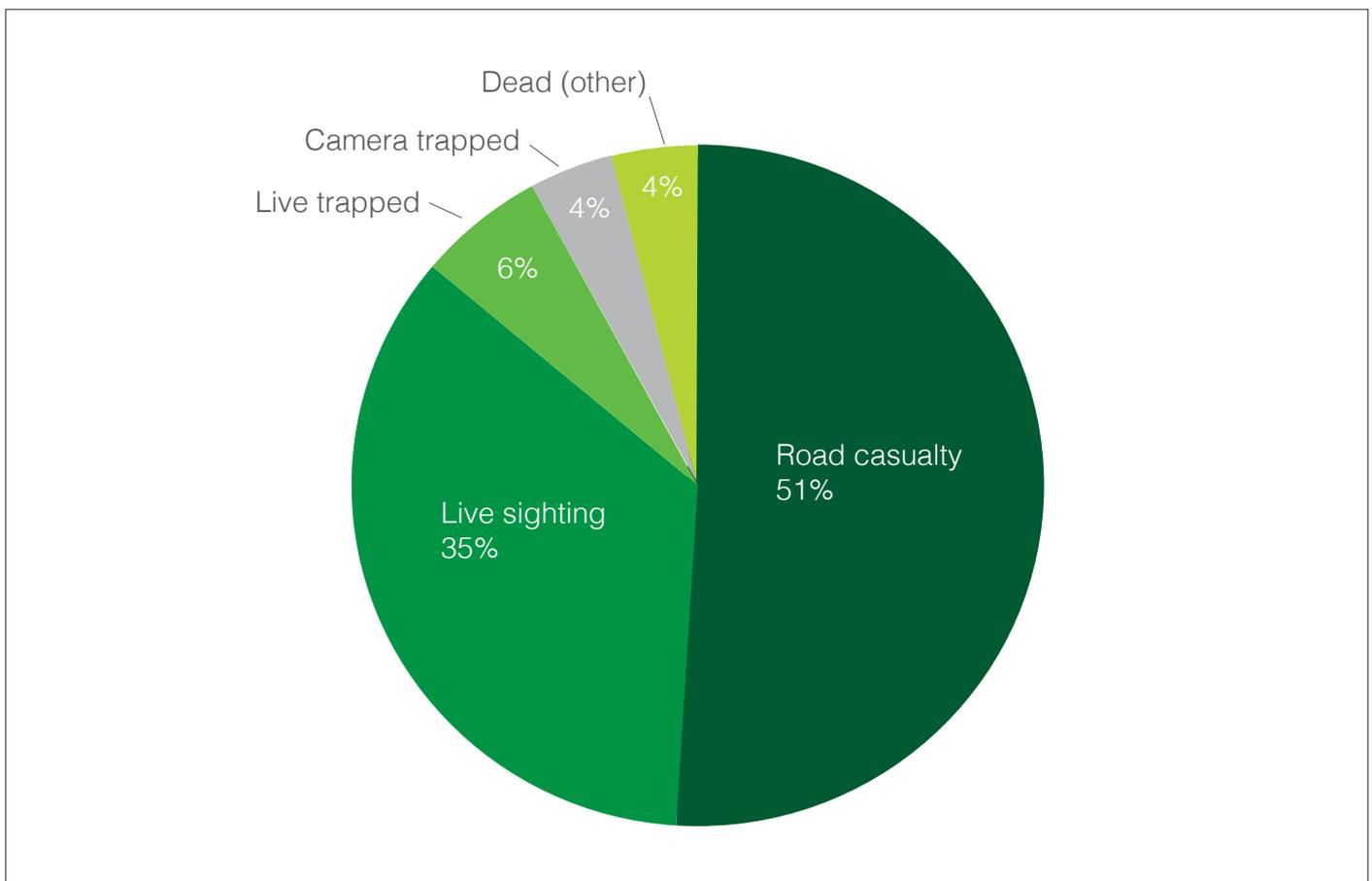


Figure 1. Types of record received during the survey.

Road casualty records peaked in March at the onset of the mating season, with a smaller peak in September when kits disperse from their mother's territory (see Figure 2). There was a large increase in the number of live sightings reported during the summer months, reaching a peak in July. Several records of breeding were received between June and September. The number of all types of records reported declined during the winter months, with the fewest records received in December.

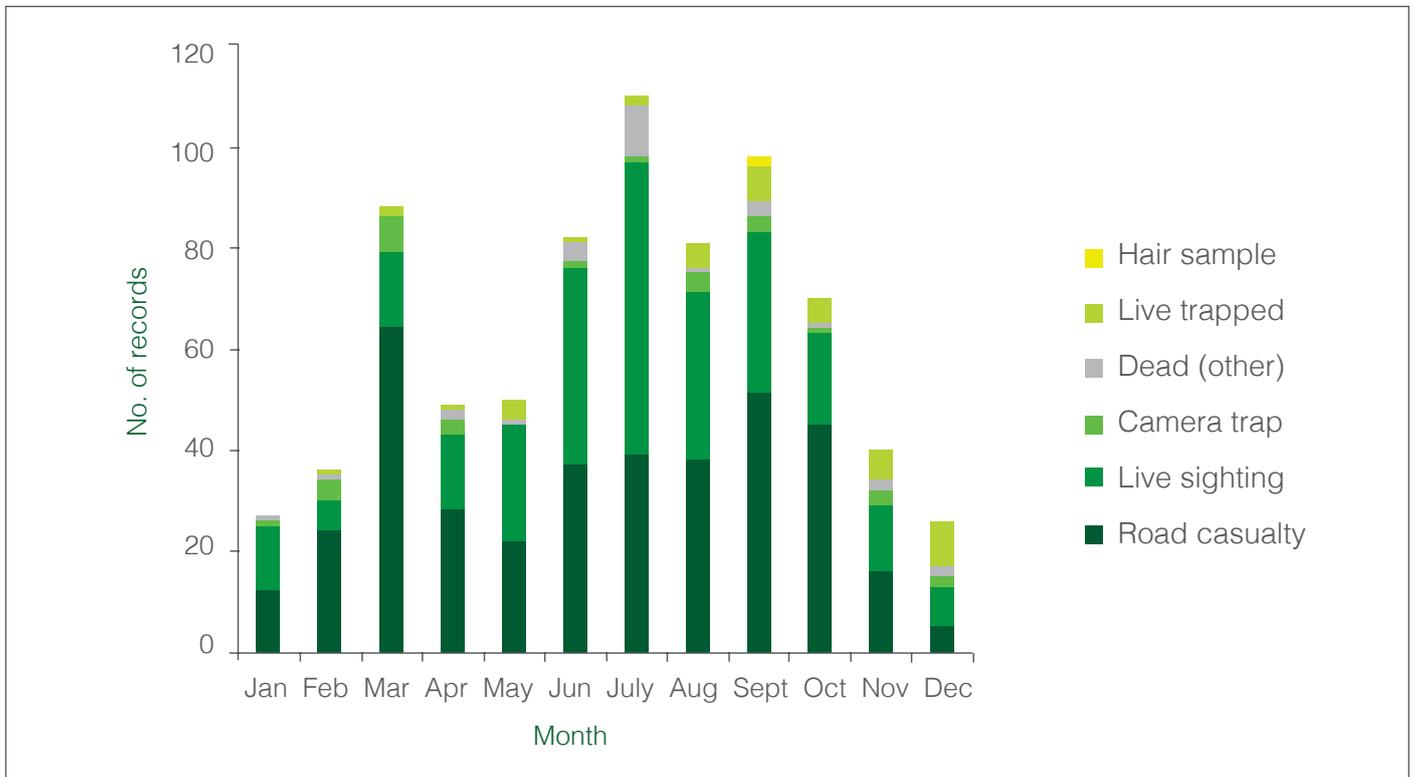
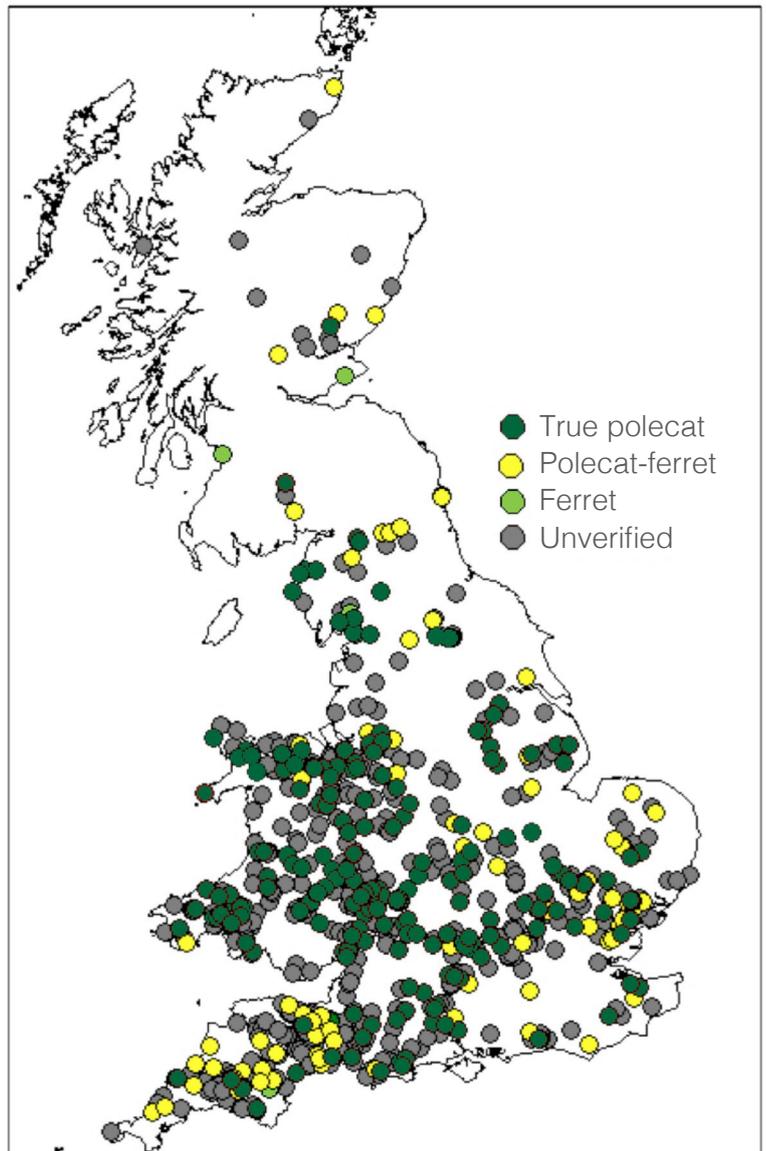


Figure 2. Types of record collected by month.

## Polecat distribution

Records have been received from widespread areas of Wales and England, with only a few records received from Scotland. The polecat's range expansion appears to have continued from the core population in Wales and central England. Where photos or videos have been provided, animals have been classified as true polecat or polecat-ferret, based on pelage characteristics. Animals classified as true polecat (on the basis of photos received) have been recorded in Devon, Kent, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, North Yorkshire and Dumfriesshire for the first time in a VWT survey (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. All records of true polecats, polecat-ferrets, ferrets and unverified specimens received between January and December 2014.



## Carcass collection

A total of 102 carcasses have been collected for analysis so far (see Figure 4).

Carcasses are currently being stored until the survey finishes at the end of 2015, when they will be analysed. We will be happy to provide the results of the analysis to anyone who is interested. If you have already asked to be informed of the results, this has been noted.

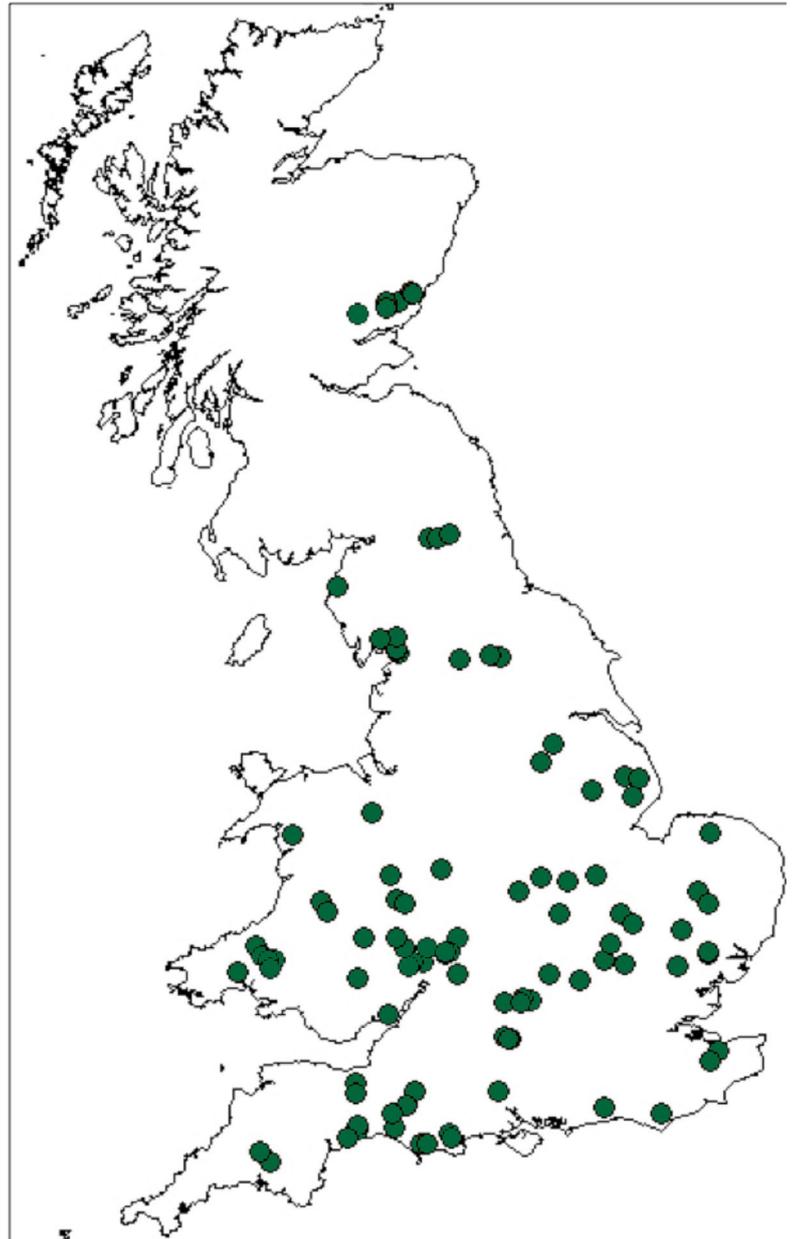


Figure 4. The distribution of carcasses collected.

## Next steps

Thank you to everyone who has contributed records to our survey so far and provided valuable information on the polecat population in Britain.

The survey continues until the end of 2015. Please continue to send in any records and carcasses during this year to further help us with our survey. When the survey is completed, the results will be written up and published as a report.

## Examples of photos received



Family of eight polecats in a field (© Clive Sawyer)



Polecat-ferret in a garden (© Judy Mackenzie)



Polecat caught in live cage trap and released (© Lynne Lomax)

# The Vincent Wildlife Trust

The Vincent Wildlife Trust has been involved in wildlife research and conservation since 1975. It has focused particularly on the needs of British mammals including the otter, pine marten, polecat, stoat, weasel, water vole, dormouse and the bats.

Currently the VWT's work is centred on the pine marten, polecat, and the rarer bats.

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[www.vwt.org.uk](http://www.vwt.org.uk)

3 & 4 Bronsil Courtyard, Eastnor, Ledbury, Herefordshire, HR8 1EP

Tel: 01531 636441

Email: [enquiries@vwt.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@vwt.org.uk)

Charity Nos. 1112100 (England) SC043066 (Scotland) DCHY00019 (Ireland)

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