



Pine marten is no “silver bullet” for grey squirrel control.

A meeting of scientists, conservationists, foresters and landowners was held in London on 14th June to discuss the potential for pine martens to reduce grey squirrel numbers. The experts present felt that more research work is needed to be carried out on the extent and effectiveness of pine martens as a possible method of control for the grey squirrel.

Organised by the European Squirrel Initiative (ESI), the symposium considered the evidence relating to the potential role of the pine marten and, whilst some exists to suggest that the pine marten may be effective in reducing grey squirrel numbers, it was felt that they would not be a ‘silver bullet’ for grey control.

Chaired by Andy Wiseman, of ESI, and with speakers representing academic institutions, The Vincent Wildlife Trust, and conservation organisations, those attending heard that the motivation for reintroducing pine marten varied considerably. Some were in favour of simply recolonizing a native species in decline while others saw pine marten reintroduction from a grey squirrel control and woodland management point of view.

While earlier research carried out in the Republic of Ireland suggested a reduction in grey squirrel numbers in the presence of pine marten, the reasons for the decline are less clear.

“It is important that we manage expectations of the role that pine marten might play in reducing grey squirrel numbers, reducing the damage to woodlands and in helping the return of the red squirrel,” said Andy Wiseman.

One of the strongest messages to come out of the symposium was the general agreement that more research is required and mechanisms need to be put in place so that problem pine martens can be controlled where appropriate.

“With pine marten being a protected species we don’t fully understand what impact they may have on the biodiversity of the countryside, for example what animals they will predate on and whether there will be any collateral damage from a significant increase in numbers. We need a simple and clear process to control numbers if necessary,” added Mr Wiseman.

“ESI is delighted to have been able to bring together such a diverse group of interested people to talk openly about the reintroduction of pine marten from their perspective. We have found some useful common ground, have a better understanding of each other’s concerns and look forward to further discussions together” said Mr Wiseman.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:



Pine marten symposium

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The European Squirrel Initiative:

The grey squirrel, *Sciurus caroliensis*, a native species of North America, was introduced to England from the late 19th century, until 1938 when it became illegal to import or keep the species in captivity.

The European Squirrel Initiative was founded in June 2002 by a group of concerned conservationists and foresters. The organisation seeks the restoration of the native red squirrel and the protection of the natural environment by removing the impact of the alien grey squirrel in Europe.

Its role is to:

- Persuade conservation bodies and governments of the absolute necessity of ridding Europe of the grey squirrel.
- Continue to commission research into the Impact of the grey squirrel on local ecosystems.

For more information visit the ESI website: www.europeansquirrelinitiative.org

Issued on behalf of the European Squirrel Initiative by Kendalls.

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