



# Pine Marten Survey

## Donacarney R150 Footpath & Cattlepass

02/09/2021

### Final Report – Not Confidential

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# Document Control

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## Field Investigations and Data

Where field investigations have been carried out, these have been restricted to a level of detail required to achieve the stated objectives of the work. Where any data supplied by the client or from other sources have been used it has been assumed that the information is correct. No responsibility can be accepted by EcoÉireann for inaccuracies in the data supplied by any other party.

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## 1. Summary

EcoÉireann was commissioned by ORS on behalf of Meath County Council to undertake a pine marten survey of the proposed development of a shared pedestrian and cycleway along the R150, between Realt na Mara Bunscoil and Bettystown Cross in Donacarney Co. Meath.

The survey comprised a species-specific survey for pine marten on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021. It is proposed to develop a 3m wide shared pedestrian and cycleway along this section of the R150, along with the development of a cattle underpass in the southern section of the proposed development. This survey was designed to assess the nature and extent of use of the hedgerow, proposed for removal as part of the development, by pine marten and assesses the potential impacts upon pine marten, following on from sightings of use during the bat survey carried out onsite in June 2020.

A desk study completed prior to the surveys highlighted no records of pine marten within the surrounding 10km Grid Square (O17).

Habitats on site were considered to be of low quality for pine marten, consisting of large areas of hardstanding and buildings, although the portions of hedgerow bounding the site provide suitable foraging and potential denning habitat. No evidence of pine marten, either denning, territory marking (scat) or foraging was recorded within and surrounding the portion of hedgerow to be removed as part of the proposed development.

No further surveys are required.



## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1 Background**

EcoÉireann was commissioned by ORS on behalf of Meath County Council to undertake a pine marten survey of the proposed development of a shared pedestrian and cycleway along the R150, between Realt na Mara Bunscoil and Bettystown Cross in Donacarney Co. Meath. It is proposed to develop a 3m wide shared pedestrian and cycleway along this section of the R150, along with the development of a cattle underpass in the southern section of the proposed development. The survey was designed to assess the nature and extent of use of the hedgerow, proposed for removal as part of the development, by pine marten and assesses the potential impacts upon pine marten, following on from sightings of use during the bat survey carried out onsite in June 2020.

This report:

- Sets out the results of the survey.
- Analyses the site's value for pine marten.
- Identifies key avoidance, mitigation and/or compensation measures required to help ensure the proposals do not have an adverse impact upon biodiversity.

### **2.2 Site Context**

Figures 1 and 2, below, identify the location and extent of the development site. The proposed development is located in north-east County Meath, to the south of the River Boyne estuary.

Figure 1: Indicative Site Boundary





Figure 2: Indicative Proposed Development





## **2.3 Nature of the Proposals**

It is proposed to develop a c. 700m pedestrian link of a 3m wide shared footpath and cycle path, from the existing pedestrian facilities at Realt na Mara Bunscoil, Donacarney, south along the eastern side of the R150 to the existing pedestrian facilities at the roundabout at Bettystown cross, see Figures 2 & 3, below. The development includes a proposed cattle underpass in the southern section of the route, details of which are provided in Figure 4, below.

The northern section of the proposed pedestrian facilities will traverse the edge of an agricultural field (c. 120m) to retain the existing roadside hedgerow. From here the shared pedestrian path will traverse the edge of the road, skirting the boundary of 9 residential properties, south for c. 170m.

The proposed development involves the realignment of the southern section of the R150, with a slight land take (2-3m) from the eastern side of this section (agricultural land use) of the road, the affected area is c. 800m<sup>2</sup> (0.197 acres). It is also proposed to relocate a drainage ditch located on this section of the road, to realigned it with the new proposed path and road layout.

Within this southern section it is proposed to remove a c.140m section of the eastern hedgerow, bounding the road and the agricultural field between the 9-no. existing residential properties and the proposed cattle underpass.

It is proposed to install a new hedge in place of this removed hedgerow along with mammal/ stock-proof fencing along the edge of the new pathway. The cattle underpass proposed to be installed will also act as a new mammal underpass.

A new lighting scheme is being proposed for this stretch of the R150, to enable safe pedestrian and vehicular transit along the proposed development.





[illegible]



## **3. Planning Policy and Legislation**

### **3.1 Planning Policy and Guidance**

A series of international and national planning policies are in place which are designed to ensure that development works do not have an adverse impact upon biodiversity, at a site or wider level. Such policies ensure that both developers and public bodies must give due consideration to the potential effects of development works upon both ecological receptors (in line with existing wildlife legislation) and biodiversity.

### **3.2 National Planning Framework**

The National Planning Framework was adopted in Ireland in 2018 which is the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland. It outlines the Government's policies through the planning process, acting as guidance for local planning authorities and decision-makers. The document places a duty on local authorities to consider the principles included when assessing planning applications and preparing Local Plans and Regional Spatial Strategies. Chapter 11 relates to the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, in line with existing wildlife legislation ensuring that environmental considerations are integrated into the Planning System.

### **3.3 Legislation**

Pine Marten are protected under the Irish Wildlife Act 1976 (as amended) (Schedules 4 & 5) and the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997 (as amended) (First Schedule) and the Bern Convention (Annex III), which makes it an offence to:

- Knowingly kill, capture, injure or disturb any individual.
- Intentionally damage or destroy a resting place or denning site, or any part thereof, except under license.
- Obstruct access to an area which is used for breeding, resting or shelter, except under license.
- Disturb a pine marten while it is using any place used for breeding, resting or shelter, except under license.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Desk Study**

Contextual information was gathered as part of a desk study undertaken prior to the start of field surveys. Such information can identify protected or notable species which may occur on the proposed development site or in the local area, as well as identifying statutory and non-statutory ecological sites which may have the potential to be affected by the proposals. The National Biodiversity Data Centre (NBDC) was consulted for records of pine marten within proximity of the proposed development site.

It should be noted that an absence of records is likely to reflect an absence of survey data and cannot be taken as confirmation that a particular species is not present in the site or surrounding area.





## 4.2 Field Survey

### 4.2.1 Pine Marten Survey

A species-specific pine marten survey was completed on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021, following the methodologies outlined in previous assessments of Pine Marten in Ireland (O'Mahony *et al.*, 2005). During the survey, the area of hedgerow proposed for removal as part of the development was searched for signs of pine marten activity and denning sites. The hedgerow was walked with hand-searches being carried out in areas of potentially suitable habitat for denning or foraging, such as the base and trunks of the semi-mature trees proposed for removal and dense portions of the hedgerow which may harbour prey species. A record was made of the location of any field signs recorded, including tracks, scats, hair (which can be caught on fences or bramble), scratch marks bedding or denning sites, using GPS co-ordinates where possible.

### 4.2.2 Weather Conditions and Survey Personnel

Surveys were completed by Senior Ecologist Eoin Cussen BSc MSc.

Surveys were completed as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Survey Times and Weather Conditions**

Date	Precipitation	Temperature (°C)	Cloud Cover (Octas)	Wind (Beaufort Scale)
20/05/2021	Heavy downpour near end of survey, none prior to this.	14°C	6/8	2

Any constraints or limitations to the survey are discussed in Section 6.1.

## 5. Baseline Conditions

### 5.1 Desk Study

No statutory or non-statutory sites designated due to the presence of pine marten were identified within 2km of the survey site.

The NBDC held no records of pine marten within the surrounding 10km Grid Square (O17). The closest most recent record of pine marten was from 2018 located c. 9.75km to the east of the proposed development on the shores of the River Boyne at the Battle of the Boyne Visitor Centre.

Evidence of use of the area by pine marten was recorded on two occasions on the same date during the initial bat survey in June 2020 (i.e. live sightings). Once at the on the west side of the road at the bridge to the north of the hedgerow proposed for removal and once along the hedgerow proposed for removal.



## **5.2 Field Survey**

### **5.2.1 Pine marten Survey**

The majority of the hedgerow is comprised of bramble and low (<1.25m), intensively managed trees (sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, elder *Sambucus nigra* and hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*). A number of semi-mature ash trees and sycamore trees are interspersed along the eastern portion of hedgerow, which is proposed for removal. The base and lower trunks (those portions covered by hedgerow) of these trees and the larger of the intensively managed trees were searched for evidence of use by pine marten (i.e. Scat (droppings, territorial markings or scratchmarks and potential denning sites).

No evidence of pine marten denning or territorial marking (scats or scratchmarks) was recorded during this species-specific hand search in May 2021.

## **6. Interpretation and Discussion**

### **6.1 Survey Constraints and Further Survey Requirements**

The survey was carried out on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 2021, in mid-spring and so the timing of the survey is not considered a major constraint. The majority of the hedgerow proposed for removal consists of intensively managed (short-cropped, <1.25m) trees and shrubs with dense bramble cover in places, large areas of which were inaccessible to the surveyor due to the dense bramble cover and narrow roadside verge on which they are located. Non of the inaccessible areas were considered to provide suitable denning areas and were viewed from the opposite side (field side) using binoculars where required. All areas considered to harbour potential for denning sites and areas of prominent features (i.e. large dead logs, stones and tree stumps) were accessed by the surveyor, therefore, the lack of access to some areas of the hedgerow is not considered a major constraint to the survey.

The study area comprises intensively managed linear hedgerow habitat immediately adjacent to an existing regional road.

No further surveys are required in this instance.

### **6.2 Impact Assessment**

Based on the proposals as shown above and provided within supporting planning documentation the development is likely to result in the temporary short-term displacement of any animals which may utilise the section of hedgerow proposed for removal for commuting or hunting and foraging purposes. This is considered a short term local impact as the hedgerow proposed for removal is relatively small, and intensively managed with a planted replacement hedgerow proposed within the development proposals.

No evidence of use of the portion of hedgerow by pine marten was recorded during the species specific surveys, although pine marten have been sighted in the area during previous bat surveys, it is considered that this area is likely utilised as a potential commuting route and foraging area.

Considering the above and the fact that the surrounding hedgerows (the majority of which are less intensively managed) are to be unaffected by the development proposals thereby enabling pine marten (and other





species) commuting and foraging activity to continue in the surrounding area; it is considered that the proposed development will have a minimal impact on the local pine marten population.

The study area comprises intensively managed linear hedgerow habitat immediately adjacent to an existing regional road, the existing source of disturbance (from traffic) and associated lack of potential denning sites, indicates that the area is unlikely to be used for denning purposes and specifically for breeding. The habitat quality and findings of the survey (no evidence of routine use) reflect this.

During operation a lighting scheme is being proposed, however, given the existing intermittent light which may arise through road use and light associated with existing dwellings the proposed lighting scheme is not expected to result in a significant effect on pine marten populations in the locality.

## 7. Mitigation and Compensation Strategy

The following measures will be implemented in order to minimise the ecological impacts of the proposals, including the residual risk of pine marten being adversely affected:

- No works will be permitted between sunset and sunrise, to avoid the risk of disturbing nocturnal species such as pine marten and bats.
- Vegetation clearance works should be undertaken using a soft/ staggered methodology (i.e. whereby vegetation is cleared by hand or to within 30cm of ground level and left at least overnight to ensure that any small mammals have the opportunity to escape to surrounding habitats)
- Any proposed felling, arboricultural works or hedgerow removal will be conducted outside the bird breeding season, which runs from March – August inclusive. If this is not possible, works will not commence until a checking survey by a Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE) has been completed within the 5 days prior, which has confirmed no active nests are present.
- All trenches will be closed overnight to help avoid trapping any wildlife which may fall in. If closure is not possible, either one side will be cut to a 45° angle or planks large enough for a person to walk up will be installed to provide animals with a potential exit route. Any trenches not closed overnight will be checked for protected and notable species each morning, prior to the recommencement of works, to ensure no protected or notable animals have become trapped inside in the interim.
- In the unlikely event that pine marten, or evidence thereof, are found within the works area during the development, works will cease immediately and the project ecologist will be contacted for advice on how to proceed.



## 8. References

CIEEM, 2013. Technical Guidance Series - Competencies for Species Survey: Pine Marten *Martes martes*.

O' Mahony, D., O'Reilly, C. and Turner P. (2005) National Pine Marten Survey of Ireland 2005. A report to the Heritage Council and Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture and Food. Ireland.



## Appendix A – Site Photographs

**Photo 1:** Trees proposed for removal along the eastern hedgerow and searched during the survey



**Photo 2:** Trees proposed for removal along the eastern hedgerow and searched during the survey



