

Beinn Ghlas Wind Farm Protected Terrestrial Mammal Walkover Survey, 2025 Update



Alba Ecology Ltd.

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Summary

Alba Ecology Ltd. was commissioned to conduct a protected terrestrial mammal survey within the Application Boundary of the Proposed Development, between the village of Taynuilt and Loch Awe, Argyll. Protected terrestrial mammal surveys were undertaken to assess the likelihood of the presence of wildcat (*Felis sylvestris*), badger (*Meles meles*), pine marten (*Martes martes*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) and red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*). Incidental records of species of conservation importance were also recorded.

Initial surveys were undertaken between May 2022 and February 2023 and were reported (Alba Ecology Commissioned Report 2023).

Walkover surveys were repeated in late March 2025 as part of an update to the surveys. This report details the updated walkover results and acts as a comparison/addition to the 2022/2023 survey.

During this survey, several watercourses were surveyed for otter and water vole, which included Eas Ruadh, Garbh Allt, Allt na Seabhaig, the Laggan Burn and several unnamed, minor watercourses which were present within the Study Area and these were also surveyed.

- Small numbers of otter spraints along Eas Ruadh, Garbh Allt, Allt an Seabhag and two unnamed watercourses. Regular crossing points were recorded within the forest that makes up much of the access track.
- A small number of potential water vole burrows were recorded on Eas Ruadh and Garbh Allt.
- A small number of pine marten scats were recorded lower down the access track, into the wooded areas.

Although there is no evidence that would suggest the Study Area is particularly important for any protected terrestrial mammal species, there is evidence of some use by otter, pine marten, red squirrel, badger and water vole. The results are discussed and compared with the results and recommendations of the 2022/2023 survey.

Introduction

A repowering project has been proposed at Beinn Ghlas by Nadara Limited. As part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process, Alba Ecology Ltd. was commissioned in 2022 to undertake protected terrestrial mammal surveys to assess the likelihood of the presence of wildcat (*Felis sylvestris*), badger (*Meles meles*), pine marten (*Martes martes*), otter (*Lutra lutra*), water vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) and red squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*).

In 2025 Alba Ecology Ltd. was commissioned to repeat this survey as an update to the original baseline. This document reports on the findings of the protected terrestrial mammal surveys undertaken in the Study Area by a highly experienced Alba Ecology surveyor in late March 2025. Incidental records of species of conservation importance were also recorded.

The protected mammal Study Area consisted of two discrete areas: (i) the proposed turbine area plus a 500m buffer zone, and (ii) the proposed access track plus a 20m buffer zone (Figure 1). The centre of the proposed turbine area is situated approximately at OS grid reference NM 978 262.

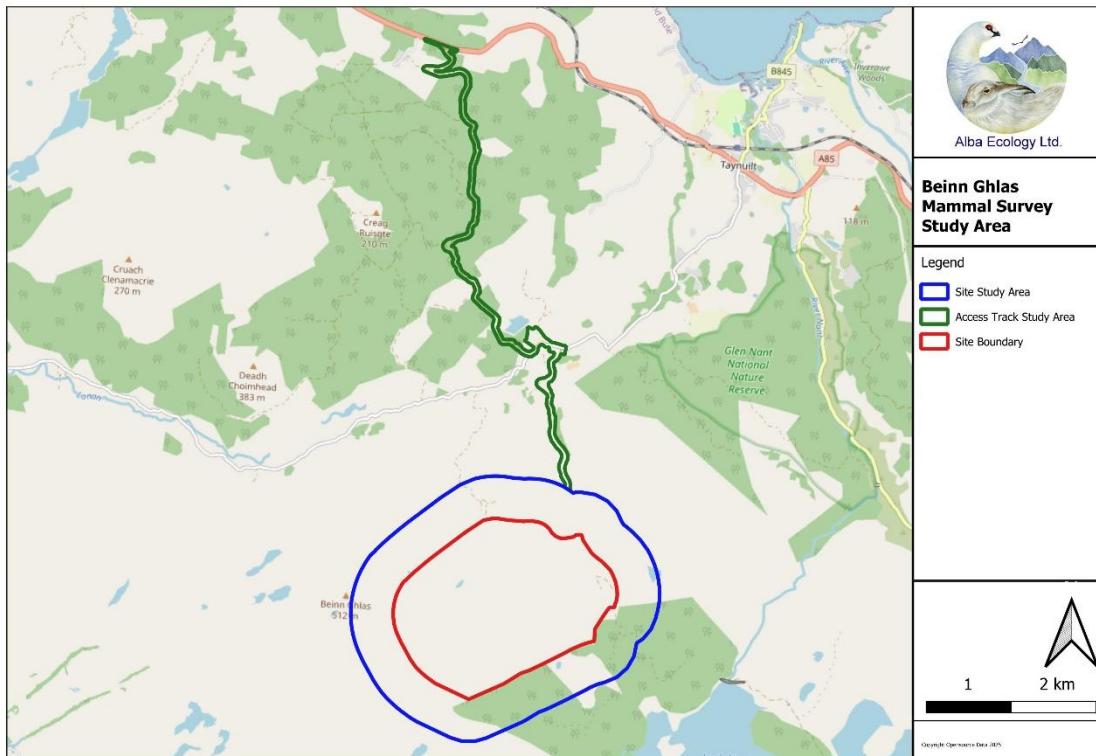


Figure 1: Map showing the mammal survey Study Area

Methods

Experienced ecologist Mr Donald Shields, MCIEEM surveyed all potentially suitable habitats for protected terrestrial mammals within the Study Area in late March 2025. The method used were the same as in the original 2022/2023 Survey (Alba Ecology, 2023).

Results

Terrestrial walkover survey for badger, pine marten and wildcat

No signs of wildcat were found within the Study Area during walkover surveys. Four pine marten scat locations were recorded in the Study Area; all along the proposed access track area (Table 2). No signs of badger were recorded during the surveys (Table 2).

Mammal Sign	Location
Pine marten scat	NM 98144 28553
Pine marten scat	NM 98187 28743
Pine marten scat	NM 97702 28939
Pine marten scat	NM 97518 29071

Table 2: Pine marten signs recorded within the Study Area.

Otter and water vole surveys

Otter spraints were recorded infrequently across the Study Area (Table 3, Photo 2). One sprainting site, along the access track was regularly used, as there was a build-up of a mix of old and fresher scat at NM 97705 28907. Next to this sprainting location an otter run and crossing point ran parallel to a small unnamed burn and crossed the proposed access track.

Potential water vole signs were recorded sparsely across the Study Area (Table 3, Photo 1), These however, did not record any evidence of likely current use of the Study Area.

Mammal Sign	Location
Otter spraint	NM 97045 29788
Otter spraint	NM 97049 29779
Otter spraint	NM 96827 25948
Regularly used otter sprainting site and important otter crossing	NM 97705 28907
Otter spraint	NM 96555 25700
Otter spraint	NM 97852 27175
Burrows (potential water vole)	NM 96270 24878
Burrows (potential water vole)	NM 96267 24837
Burrows (potential water vole)	NM 96327 24823

Table 3: Otter and potential water vole signs recorded within the Study Area.



Photo 1: Example photo of water vole burrow, March 2025.



Photo 2: Example photo of otter spraint, , March 2025.

Red squirrel survey

Visual sightings of red squirrels were seen within the conifer forest part of the proposed access track area and many hundreds of chewed cones littered the forest floor adjacent to the existing access track. These feeding signs were far too common to plot individually and it should be assumed that red squirrel is omnipresent within the conifer forest part of the Study Area. There were many thousands of mature conifer trees present within the 20m buffer zone along either side the proposed access track and it was simply not possible to search effectively for dreys within these trees.

Mammal signs recording in March 2025 within the Study Area are shown in Figure 2.

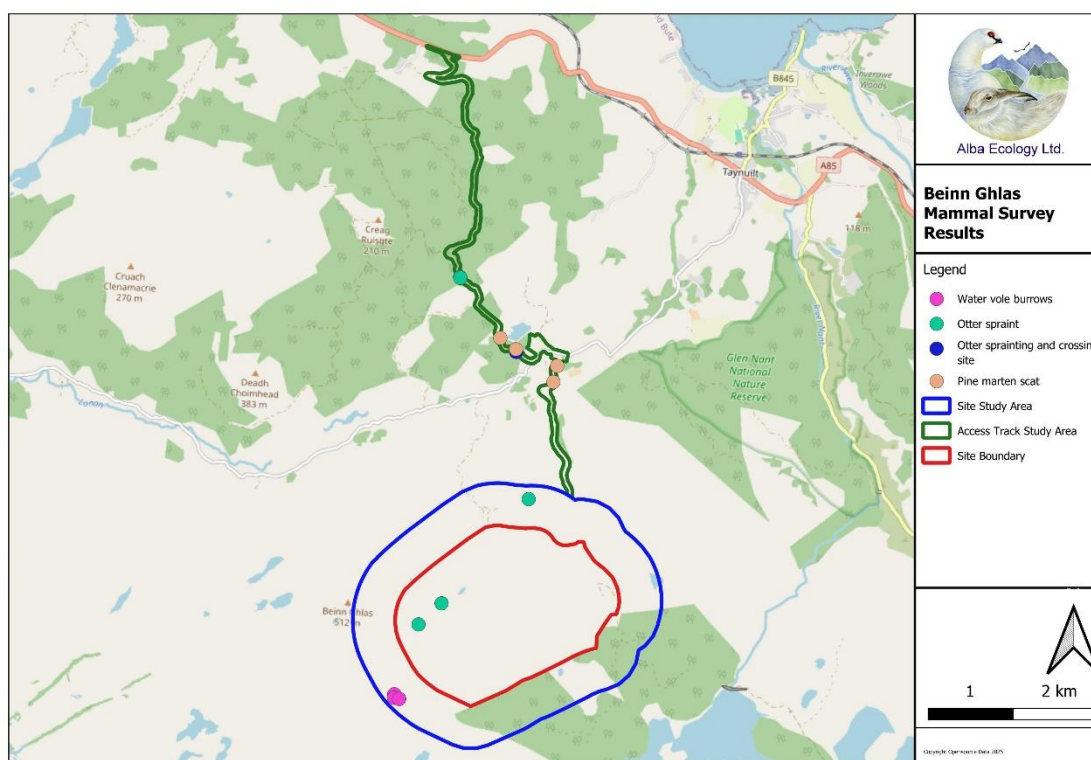


Figure 2: Map showing locations of protected terrestrial mammal field signs in the Study Area 2025

The 2025 surveys of the proposed access track area recorded several mature broadleaved trees with holes or snags some of which had potential to hold pine martens and/or had bat roost potential.

Discussion

The main limitations of this protected terrestrial mammal survey are recognised to apply to most ecological surveys. The protected terrestrial mammal surveys undertaken in the Study Area were sampling techniques, not absolute censi. Results give an indication of numbers and activities of species at the particular times that surveys were carried out. Species occurrence changes over time; so, the results presented in this report are snapshots in time (specifically March 2025). Nevertheless, surveys were undertaken during the period of the year when protected mammal activity would likely be high for most species.

All protected terrestrial mammal survey reaches were easily accessible. Consequently, survey coverage was considered very good across the entire Study Area.

Wildcat

No evidence of wildcat was recorded within the Study Area. The results from the survey suggest that the Study Area was not important for, or regularly used by wildcat during the period of survey.

These are the same conclusions as were in the original report. Consequently, the advice within that report remains the same.

Badger

No evidence of use of the Study Area by badger was recorded in March 2025. The results from the survey suggest that the Study Area was not important for, or regularly used by badger during the period of survey.

In the 2022/2023 survey a single badger latrine was recorded along the access track at NM 98043 29008. The initial survey reported that the Study Area while occasionally used by badgers, was not necessarily important for them. The results from this update survey concur with this.

Pine marten

There was evidence of pine marten use (scat), with field signs recorded in both parts of the Study Area. However, there was no sign of any pine marten dens (which are specially protected). Consequently, although there is no evidence that would suggest the Study Area is important for pine marten, they do use the Study Area.

These are the same conclusions as were in the original report. Consequently, the advice within that report remains the same.

Otter

The otter surveys recorded small numbers of otter signs e.g. spraints and a well-used run within the Study Area in 2025. No holts or couches were recorded within the Study Area. This suggests that while otters used the Study Area occasionally it was not necessarily important for them. It suggests that the run and crossing point was relatively important.

These are the same conclusions as were in the original report. Consequently, the advice within that report remains the same.

Water Vole

Although late March is outwith the normal survey period for water voles (April-September inclusive), as this was an updated survey, it was considered that any distinct changes to populations of water voles in the form of extra burrows or colonies in different locations would be noticeable, even though it was just outside the usual survey window. In addition, any burrows recorded would be considered 'active' without the presence of other signs (latrines, feeding signs etc. being present. This was considered to ensure results were robust, particularly when the usual survey season was only a few days away.

Potential water vole burrows were recorded in three locations within the Study Area (Table 3). Assuming the burrows were water vole burrows, the evidence suggests that while water voles are present within the Study Area, it is not an area with a large or necessarily permanent population.

These are the same conclusions as were in the original report. Consequently, the advice within that report remains the same.

Red squirrel

Given the presence of red squirrels throughout all the conifer forest part of the proposed access track area, it is important to consider red squirrels.

These are the same conclusions as were in the original report. Consequently, the advice within that report remains the same.

When compared with the results of the main survey conducted in 2022 and 2023, the results recorded here were broadly similar. Some differences with locations and numbers of mammal signs are to be expected when looking for signs. However, these differences are, in this instance, considered to be relatively minor.

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