

Polecat

Mustela putorius

Mammal · Here all year · does not hibernate



Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

A medium-sized mustelid with dark guard hairs over a creamy-buff undercoat, giving a two-tone look, and a distinctive facial mask — dark around the eyes with white patches on the muzzle and behind the ears. Polecats were reduced to a small population in Wales by persecution and have been spreading back across Britain, and animals are now recorded in south-west Scotland.

BEHAVIOUR

Polecats hunt at night along hedgerow, farmland and woodland edge, taking rabbits, rats, amphibians and birds, and will store surplus kills in a larder. They are the wild ancestor of the domestic ferret, and the two interbreed readily, so some animals seen are ferret hybrids with paler, less well-defined masks. Like other mustelids they use scent heavily, and the species' old name — fougart, 'foul marten' — reflects it.

WHEN TO SEE IT

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Mustelids (Mustelidae)
SIZE	Body 32–45 cm plus a 12–19 cm tail
UK STATUS	Protected; recolonising after historic persecution

Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Natureville