

Report under The Conservation of Habitats and  
Species Regulations 2017 (as amended),  
Regulation 9A

**2019-2024**

Conservation status assessment for the species:

**S1358 - Polecat**

***(Mustela putorius)***

**England**



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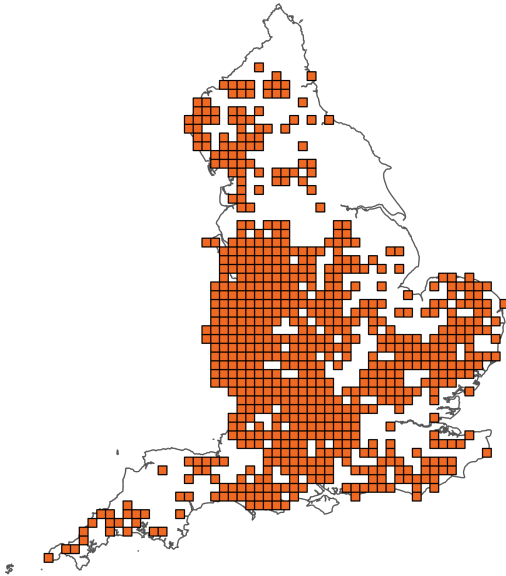
### **Important note - Please read**

- The information in this document represents the England Report under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), Regulation 9A, for the period 2019-2024.
- It is based on supporting information provided by Natural England, which is documented separately.
- The Habitats Regulations reporting 2019-2024 Approach Document provides details on how this supporting information contributed to the UK Report and the fields that were completed for each parameter.
- Maps showing the distribution and range of the species are included.
- Explanatory notes (where provided) are included at the end. These provide additional audit trail information to that included within the assessments. Further underpinning explanatory notes are available in the related country reports.
- Some of the reporting fields have been left blank because either: (i) there was insufficient information to complete the field; (ii) completion of the field was not obligatory; and/or (iii) the field was not relevant to this species (section 12 National Site Network coverage for Annex II species).

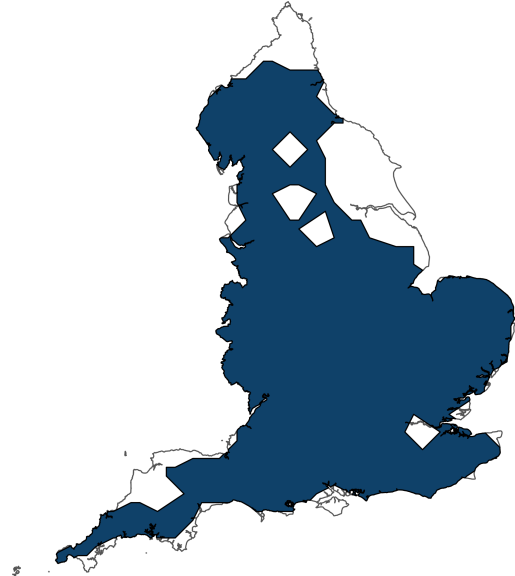
Further details on the approach to the Habitats Regulations Reporting 2019-2024 are available on the [JNCC website](#).

## Assessment Summary: Polecat

### Distribution Map



### Range Map



**Figure 1:** England distribution and range map for S1358 - Polecat (*Mustela putorius*). Coastline boundary derived from the Oil and Gas Authority's OGA and Lloyd's Register SNS Regional Geological Maps (Open Source). Open Government Licence v3 (OGL). Contains data © 2017 Oil and Gas Authority. The 10km grid square distribution map is based on available species records within the current reporting period.

**Table 1:** Table summarising the conservation status for S1358 - Polecat (*Mustela putorius*). Overall conservation status for species is based on assessments of range, population, habitat for the species, and future prospects.

### Overall Conservation Status (see section 11)

Favourable (FV)

### Breakdown of Overall Conservation Status

Range (see section 5)	Favourable (FV)
Population (see section 6)	Favourable (FV)
Habitat for the species (see section 7)	Favourable (FV)
Future prospects (see section 10)	Favourable (FV)

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## National Level

### 1. General information

1.1 Country	England
1.2 Species code	S1358
1.3 Species scientific name	<i>Mustela putorius</i>
1.4 Alternative species scientific name	
1.5 Common name	Polecat
Annex(es)	V

### 2. Maps

2.1 Sensitive species	No
2.2 Year or period	1995-2024
2.3 Distribution map	Yes
2.4 Distribution map; Method used	Based mainly on extrapolation from a limited amount of data

#### 2.5 Additional information

The range map has been produced following the same methodology that was used in 2007 and 2013 whereby a 45km alpha hull value has been used for all species with a starting range unit of individual 10km squares. In 2018 range was taken from Mathews et al, whereby an alpha hull value of 20km was drawn around the presence records, which represented the best balance between the inclusion of unoccupied sites (i.e. where records are sparse but close enough for inclusion) and the exclusion of occupied areas due to gaps in the data (i.e. where records exist but are too isolated for inclusion). An additional 10km buffer was added to the final hull polygon to provide smoothing to the hull and to ensure that the hull covered the areas recorded rather than intersecting them. That process led to the production of much finer detailed maps being produced.

Additionally, for the 2026 Regulation 9A reporting round the distribution datasets reported for all features have been created using existing Natural England source data and additional datasets made available to Natural England for Regulation 9a reporting under Open Government (OGL) or Creative Commons (CC-BY) licence. The

reinterpretation of source data is a methodological change which has resulted in changes to mapped distribution and hence range for some features. In a few cases the available data is known to not reflect the full distribution of a feature. In order to attempt to overcome this issue, the date range for the collection of presence data for this species has been set at 1995-2024. Where apparent change is an artefact of the mapping approach, rather than real change in distribution it will be highlighted, and associated changes in range explained, in the assessment text.

### 3. Information related to Annex V Species

**3.1 Is the species taken in the wild / exploited?** Yes

#### 3.2 What measures have been taken?

**a) Regulations regarding access to property** No

**b) Temporary or local prohibition on the taking of specimens in the wild and exploitation** No

**c) Regulation of the periods and/or methods of taking specimens** No

**d) Application of hunting and fishing rules which take account of the conservation of such populations** No

**e) Establishment of a system of licences for taking specimens or of quotas** No

**f) Regulation of the purchase, sale, offering for sale, keeping for sale, or transport for sale of specimens** No

**g) Breeding in captivity of animal species as well as artificial propagation of plant species** No

**Other measures** No

#### Other measures description

#### 3.3: Hunting bag or quantity taken in the wild for Mammals and Acipenseridae (Fish)

**a) Unit** number of individuals

**Table 2:** Quantity taken from the wild during the reporting period (see 3.3a for units). For species with defined hunting seasons, Season 1 refers to 2018/2019 (autumn 2018 to spring 2019), and Season 6 to 2023/2024. For species without hunting seasons, data are reported by calendar year: Year 1 is 2019, and Year 6 is 2024.

	Season/ year 1	Season/ year 2	Season/ year 3	Season/ year 4	Season/ year 5	Season/ year 6
<b>b) Minimum</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>c) Maximum</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>d) Unknown</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-

### 3.4: Hunting bag or quantity taken in the wild; Method used

### 3.5: Additional information

No additional information

## Biogeographical Level

### 4. Biogeographical and marine regions

4.1 Biogeographical or marine region where the species occurs ATL

#### 4.2 Sources of information

See section 14 References

### 5. Range

5.1 Surface area (km<sup>2</sup>) 107,224

5.2 Short-term trend; Period 2013-2024

5.3 Short-term trend; Direction Increasing

#### 5.4 Short-term trend; Magnitude

a) Estimated minimum

<b>b) Estimated maximum</b>	
<b>c) Pre-defined range</b>	
<b>d) Unknown</b>	
<b>e) Type of estimate</b>	
<b>f) Rate of decrease</b>	
<b>5.5 Short-term trend; Method used</b>	Based mainly on extrapolation from a limited amount of data
<b>5.6 Long-term trend; Period</b>	
<b>5.7 Long-term trend; Direction</b>	
<b>5.8 Long-term trend; Magnitude</b>	
<b>a) Minimum</b>	
<b>b) Maximum</b>	
<b>c) Rate of decrease</b>	
<b>5.9 Long-term trend; Method used</b>	
<b>5.10 Favourable Reference Range (FRR)</b>	
<b>a) Area (km<sup>2</sup>)</b>	85,377
<b>b) Pre-defined increment</b>	
<b>c) Unknown</b>	No
<b>d) Method used</b>	Model-based approach
<b>e) Quality of information</b>	moderate
<b>5.11 Change and reason for change in surface area of range</b>	
<b>a) Change</b>	Yes
<b>b) Genuine change</b>	Yes
<b>c) Improved knowledge or more accurate data</b>	Yes
<b>d) Different method</b>	Yes

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**e) No information**

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**f) Other reason**

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**g) Main reason** Genuine change

### 5.12 Additional information

The favourable reference range value is considered to be large enough to support a viable population and no lower than the range estimate when the Habitats Directive came into force in the UK. For further information see the 2019 Article 17 UK Approach document. The current FRR has been calculated using the method outlined in Mathews et al. (2018) and is based on presence data collected between 1995-2016. Areas that contain very isolated records may not have been included in the area of distribution.

There appears to be an ongoing increase in range, however the change in range is also due to a change in methodology.

## 6. Population

**6.1 Year or period** 1995-2024

### 6.2 Population size (in reporting unit)

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**a) Unit** number of individuals

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**b) Minimum** 53,900

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**c) Maximum** 79,000

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**d) Best single value** 66,400

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**6.3 Type of estimate** 95% confidence interval

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**6.4 Quality of extrapolation to reporting unit** low

### 6.5 Additional population size (using population unit other than reporting unit)

---

**a) Unit**

---

**b) Minimum**

---

**c) Maximum**

---

**d) Best single value**

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**e) Type of estimate**

<b>6.6 Population size; Method used</b>	Based mainly on extrapolation from a limited amount of data
<b>6.7 Short-term trend; Period</b>	2013-2024
<b>6.8 Short-term trend; Direction</b>	Uncertain
<b>6.9 Short-term trend; Magnitude</b>	
<b>a) Estimated minimum</b>	
<b>b) Estimated maximum</b>	
<b>c) Pre-defined range</b>	
<b>d) Unknown</b>	Yes
<b>e) Type of estimate</b>	
<b>f) Rate of decrease</b>	
<b>6.10 Short-term trend; Method used</b>	Based mainly on extrapolation from a limited amount of data
<b>6.11 Long-term trend; Period</b>	
<b>6.12 Long-term trend; Direction</b>	
<b>6.13 Long-term trend; Magnitude</b>	
<b>a) Minimum</b>	
<b>b) Maximum</b>	
<b>c) Confidence interval</b>	
<b>d) Rate of decrease</b>	
<b>6.14 Long-term trend; Method used</b>	
<b>6.15 Favourable Reference Population (FRP)</b>	
<b>ai) Population size</b>	
<b>aii) Unit</b>	
<b>b) Pre-defined increment</b>	

---

c) Unknown Yes

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d) Method used

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e) Quality of information

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#### 6.16 Change and reason for change in population size

a) Change No

---

b) Genuine change

---

c) Improved knowledge or more accurate data

---

d) Different method

---

e) No information

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f) Other reason

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g) Main reason

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#### 6.17 Additional information

No additional information

6.18 Age structure, mortality and reproduction deviation No deviation from normal

## 7. Habitat for the species

### 7.1 Sufficiency of area and quality of occupied habitat (for long-term survival)

a) Is area of occupied habitat sufficient? Yes

---

b) Is quality of occupied habitat sufficient? Yes

---

c) If No or Unknown, is there a sufficiently large area of unoccupied habitat of suitable quality?

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### 7.2 Sufficiency of area and quality of occupied habitat; Method used

**a) Sufficiency of area of occupied habitat; Method used** Based mainly on extrapolation from a limited amount of data

**b) Sufficiency of quality of occupied habitat; Method used** Based mainly on extrapolation from a limited amount of data

**7.3 Short-term trend; Period** 2013-2024

**7.4 Short-term trend; Direction** Stable

**7.5 Short-term trend; Method used** Based mainly on extrapolation from a limited amount of data

**7.6 Long-term trend; Period**

**7.7 Long-term trend; Direction**

**7.8 Long-term trend; Method used**

**7.9 Additional information**

No additional information

## 8. Main pressures

### 8.1 Characterisation of pressures

**Table 3:** Pressures affecting the species, including timing and importance/impact ranking. Pressures are defined as factors acting currently and/or during the reporting period (2019–2024). Rankings are: High (direct/immediate influence and/or large spatial extent) and Medium (moderate direct/immediate influence, mainly indirect and/or regional extent).

Pressure	Timing	Ranking
PA02: Conversion from one type of agricultural land use to another (excluding drainage and burning)	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	Medium (M)
PA14: Use of plant protection chemicals in agriculture	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	High (H)
PA04: Removal of small landscape features for agricultural land parcel consolidation (hedges, stone walls, rushes, open ditches, springs, solitary trees, etc.)	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	High (H)

PG11: Illegal shooting/killing	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	High (H)
PG14: Poisoning of animals (excluding lead poisoning)	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	High (H)
PE01: Roads, paths, railroads and related infrastructure	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	Medium (M)
PF01: Conversion from other land uses to built-up areas	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	Medium (M)
PI02: Other invasive alien species (other than species of Union concern)	Ongoing and likely to be in the future	Medium (M)

## 8.2 Sources of information

See section 14 References

## 8.3 Additional information

No additional information

## 9. Conservation measures

### 9.1: Status of measures

a) Are measures needed? No

### b) Indicate the status of measures

### 9.2 Main purpose of the measures taken

### 9.3 Location of the measures taken

### 9.4 Response to measures

### 9.5 List of main conservation measures

**Table 4:** Key conservation measures addressing current pressures and/or anticipated threats during the next two reporting periods (2025–2036). Measures are ranked by importance/impact: High (direct/immediate influence and/or large spatial extent) and Medium (moderate direct/immediate influence, mainly indirect and/or regional extent).

Conservation measure	Ranking
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No conservation measures	
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## 9.6 Additional information

No additional information

## 10. Future prospects

### 10.1a Future trends of parameters

<b>ai) Range</b>	Positive - increasing $\leq 1\%$ (one percent or less) per year on average
<b>bi) Population</b>	Positive - increasing $\leq 1\%$ (one percent or less) per year on average
<b>ci) Habitat for the species</b>	Overall stable

### 10.1b Future prospects of parameters

<b>aii) Range</b>	Good
<b>bii) Population</b>	Good
<b>cii) Habitat for the species</b>	Good

## 10.2 Additional information

Since the 2004-2006 survey (Birks, 2008), the polecat's range has continued to expand in England (Croose, 2016). The polecats recovery has been due to the reduction in trapping pressures, legal protection, a post-myxomatosis increase in the rabbit population and the polecats ability to utilise a diverse range of habitats. However, the expansion of the polecats range has also been aided by releases of polecats, which masks the true extent of natural range expansion in parts of Britain. There is also difficulty in separating true polecats from polecat-ferrets and this presents challenges for accurately recording polecats, particularly in areas in which polecats are newly re-establishing. There is evidence to support the theory that polecats will outcompete polecat-ferrets or feral ferrets in the long-term, resulting in a population in which true polecats are dominant, which would suggest that the long-term impact of hybridisation is not a cause for concern (Croose, 2016).

Although the methodology has changed since previous reporting rounds, the current population estimate concurs with previous estimates and represents a significant increase in population size (Croose, 2016; Mathews et al, 2018).

Habitat for this species is considered to be stable due to their ability to utilise a wide range of habitats across Britain. Future trend in Range is Positive; future trend in Population is Positive; and future trend in Habitat for the species is Overall Stable.

A new National Polecat Survey is due to conclude at the end of 2025, which may change these.

## 11. Conclusions

<b>11.1 Range</b>	Favourable (FV)
<b>11.2 Population</b>	Favourable (FV)
<b>11.3 Habitat for the species</b>	Favourable (FV)
<b>11.4 Future prospects</b>	Favourable (FV)
<b>11.5 Overall assessment of Conservation Status</b>	Favourable (FV)
<b>11.6 Overall trend in Conservation Status</b>	Improving

### 11.7 Change and reason for change in conservation status

This field is not reported as the period 2019-2024 marks the first instance in which conservation status has been assessed at the national level, meaning no comparisons to previous reports can be drawn.

### 11.7 Change and reason for change in conservation status trend

This field is not reported as the period 2019-2024 marks the first instance in which conservation status has been assessed at the national level, meaning no comparisons to previous reports can be drawn.

### 11.8 Additional information

No additional information

## **12. UK National Site Network (pSCIs, SCIs, SACs) coverage for Annex II species**

### **12.1 Population size inside the pSCIs, SCIs and SACs network**

a) Unit

---

b) Minimum

---

c) Maximum

---

d) Best single value

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### **12.2 Type of estimate**

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**12.3 Population size inside the network; Method used**

**12.4 Short-term trend of population size within the network; Direction**

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**12.5 Short-term trend of population size within the network; Method used**

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**12.6 Short-term trend of habitat for the species inside the pSCIs, SCIs and SACs network; Direction**

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**12.7 Short-term trend of habitat for the species inside the pSCIs, SCIs and SACs network; Method used**

### **12.8 Additional information**

No additional information

## **13. Complementary information**

### **13.1 Justification of percentage thresholds for trends**

No justification information

### **13.2 Trans-boundary assessment**

No trans-boundary assessment information

### **13.2 Other relevant information**

No other relevant information

## 14. References

### Biogeographical and marine regions

#### 4.2 Sources of information

Birks, J.D.S. (2008). The Polecat Survey of Britain 2004-2006. A report on the Polecat's distribution, status and conservation. The Vincent Wildlife Trust

Birks, J.D.S. (2015). Polecats. Whittet Books Ltd

Croose, E. (2016). The Distribution and Status of the Polecats (*Mustela putorius*) in Britain 2014-2015. the Vincent Wildlife Trust

Harris, S.J., Massimino, D., Newson, S.E., Eaton, M.A., Balmer, D.E., Noble, D.G., Musgrove, A.J., Gillings, S., Proctor, D. and Pearce-Higgins, J.W. (2015). The Breeding Bird Survey 2014. BTO Research Report 673. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford

Harris, S.J., Massimino, D., Balmer, D.E., Eaton, M.A., Noble, D.G., Pearce-Higgins, J.W., Woodcock, P. and Gillings, S. (2020). The Breeding Bird Survey 2019. BTO Research Report 726. British Trust for Ornithology, Thetford

JNCC (2019). Fourth report by the United Kingdom on the Article 17 Habitats Directive. Available at <http://jncc.gov.uk/our-work/article-17-habitats-directive-report-2019/>

Langley, P.J.W. and Yalden, D.W. (1977). Decline of rarer carnivores in Great Britain during 19th century. *Mammal Review*, 7 (3-4), 95-116

Mathews, F., Kubasiewicz, L.M., Gurnell, J., Harrower, C., McDonald, R.A., Shore, R.F. (2018). A review of the population and conservation status of British Mammals. A report by the Mammal Society under contract to Natural England, Natural Resources Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage

### Main pressures

#### 8.2 Sources of information

No sources of information

## 15. Explanatory Notes

Field label	Note
1.5: Common name	The polecat is now present throughout Wales and is continuing to extend its range eastwards, though this process may have been assisted by covert reintroductions, notably in Cumbria. Distribution recording is complicated by confusion with polecat-ferret hybrids, but methods for identifying true polecats by pelage characteristics are well-established. Nevertheless, it is likely that some hybrids are still reported as true polecats, particularly when independent verification is not possible (e.g. sightings) and records outside the main distribution should be treated with caution.
3.1: Is the species taken in the wild/ exploited	Although the polecats initial recovery was driven by a reduction in trapping pressure in the early 20th century (Langley and Yalden, 1977), there are still pressures from trapping and secondary rodenticide poisoning. Records recorded from traps set for other species were received for both the 2004-2006 and 2014-2015 National Polecat Surveys (Birks, 2008; Croose, 2016). The fourth National Polecat Survey is due to be completed at the end of 2025.
5.5: Short-term trend; Method used	Range is based on presence data collected between 1995-2024. Areas that contain very isolated records may not have been included in the distribution. The range map has been produced following the same methodology that was used in 2007 and 2013 whereby a 45km alpha hull value has been used for all species with a starting range unit of individual 10km squares. In 2018 range was taken from Mathews et al, whereby an alpha hull value of 20km was drawn around the presence records, which represented the best balance between the inclusion of unoccupied sites (i.e. where records are sparse but close enough for inclusion) and the exclusion of occupied areas due to gaps in the data (i.e. where records exist but are too isolated for inclusion). An additional 10km buffer was added to the final hull polygon to provide smooting to the hull and to ensure that the hull covered the areas recorded rather

	<p>than intersecting them. That process led to the production of much finer detailed maps being produced. However, this approach to mapping was not an option for this reporting round (2018-2024).</p>
6.2: Population size	<p>Population size estimates were taken from Mathews et al (2018). Estimates were based on 136 individual density estimates from one study. These density estimates were area, rather than habitat-specific and so an assessment of the proportion of population size and area accounted for by each habitat is not possible. Surveys were conducted between 1997 and 1999 and more up-to-date estimates would be beneficial.</p>
6.6: Population size; Method used	<p>As polecats are generalists and can be found in most habitats, population density estimates from the literature refer to the density of polecats, regardless of a specific habitat type. Previous population density estimates have been calculated based on the total area of occupied 1km squares, rather than being applied to a specific habitat type. In order to reflect the species' generalist behaviour, Mathews et al (2018) calculated population sizes by multiplying the population density by the total area of the species' distribution. Adjustment was made for the unlikely occurrence of polecats in urban areas by removing areas classed as urban in the LCM 2007 data.</p>
6.18: Age structure, mortality and reproduction	<p>There is no evidence to suggest any deviation from the normal age structure, mortality, or reproduction rates. However, no formal studies have been conducted to confirm these findings.</p>
7.1: Sufficiency of area and quality of occupied habitat	<p>Polecats are a generalist species in terms of their habitat. However, there is some evidence of a preference for woodland edge, field boundaries and farm buildings, with an avoidance of more open areas, as well as suburban and urban areas (Birks, 2015). Unlike elsewhere in Europe, polecats in Britain do not show a preference for riparian habitats and this is likely to be due to the avoidance of competition with mink and due to the abundance of rabbits throughout their range which provides a source of food away from riparian habitats (Birks, 2015).</p>

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7.2: Sufficiency of area and quality of occupied habitat; Methods used

The habitable area has been taken from Mathews et al (2018), which, given the generalist nature of this species, defined the area of suitable habitat as the total range size minus the area of urban and garden habitats. The area of suitable habitat in England is 78,100km<sup>2</sup>.

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8.1: Characterisation of pressures

Issues which continue to threaten polecats include road accidents, trapping mortality, secondary rodenticide poisoning, changes in agricultural practices, and the loss of genetic integrity through hybridisation with feral domestic ferret *Mustela furo*. The status of the rabbit population in Britain may also have some impact, with the British Trust for Ornithology's Breeding Bird Survey reporting a UK-wide decline of 64% in the rabbit population between 1996-2018 (Harris et al, 2020). It is not currently known how this will impact on the population in the long-term.