

Species Factsheet: Pine Marten (*Martes martes*)



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Quick Facts

Recognition: Dark brown fur; yellow/white throat patch; long fluffy tail; about the size of a small cat.

Size: Males 51-54cm; females 46-54cm; Tail length: males 26-27cm; females 18-24cm.

Weight: Males 1.5-2.2kg; females 0.9-1.5kg.

Life Span: Maximum life expectancy is 8 years.



Distribution & Habitat

Pine martens are found in the Scottish Highlands and Grampians, with isolated populations in southern Scotland. In England and North Wales pine martens seem to be on the verge of extinction. They are widespread and relatively common in Ireland. Although they occur in a wide range of habitats, pine martens prefer well-wooded areas with plenty of cover.

General Ecology

Behaviour

Marten dens are commonly found in hollow trees or the fallen root masses of Scots pines, an association that probably earned pine martens their name; cairns and cliffs covered with scrub are frequently used as alternative den sites. Martens have territories that vary in size according to habitat and food availability; for males these are about 10-25 square kilometres and for females about 5-15 square kilometres. They mark their territories with faeces (known as scats) deposited in places where they are conspicuous to other martens; they are frequently left along forestry trails.

Diet and Feeding

Pine martens are generalist predators, feeding on small rodents, birds, beetles, carrion, eggs and fungi. In autumn, berries are a staple.

Reproduction

Young martens are born blind and hairless, in litters of 1-5, in early spring and stay with their mothers for about six weeks. Their eyes open at the end of May and by mid-June they begin to emerge from their den. Male martens play no direct part in rearing the young.

Conservation status

Martens and their dens are fully protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981); martens must not be trapped, sold or disturbed except under licence from Scottish Natural Heritage, the Countryside Council for Wales or Natural England. Despite this legal protection, poisoned baits and traps, often set for hooded crows and foxes, still probably account for many marten deaths each year. Others are also shot at hen houses, and some are killed when mistaken for mink.

Until the 19th Century, pine martens were found throughout much of mainland Britain, the Isle of Wight and some of the Scottish islands. Habitat fragmentation, persecution by gamekeepers and martens being killed for their fur, drastically reduced this distribution. By 1926, the main pine marten population in Britain was restricted to a small area of north-west Scotland, with small numbers in N Wales and the Lake District. They have now increased their range in Scotland, and now occur throughout the Highlands, N of the Central Belt.

