

all about

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PINE MARTEN

Martes martes

Pine martens are cat sized members of the weasel family with long bodies (65–70cm) covered with dark brown fur. They have a large creamy white throat patch which is often tinged with orange, big dark eyes and large rounded ears. Pine martens are excellent climbers with sharp, gripping claws and a long bushy tail for balance. They can leap over 3 metres from branch to branch and sometimes look as if they are flying between the trees. The soles of their feet are hairy which stops them slipping when it is icy. They bound along the ground rather than walk.

Where do they live?

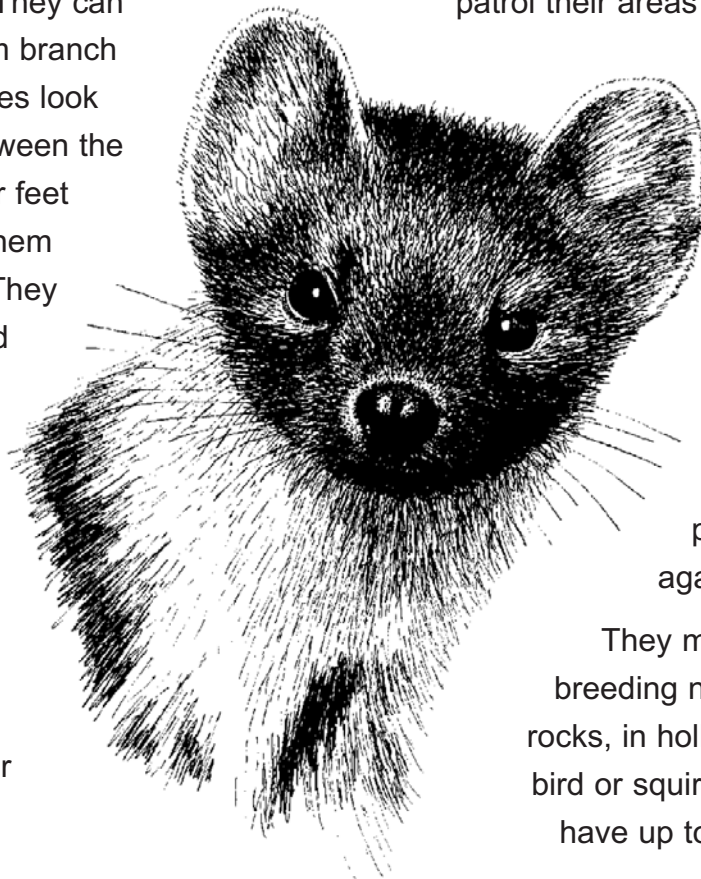
The pine marten's ideal home is in native woodland although they live in many other places, including conifer plantations and rocky

hillsides. A pine marten's home range is dependent to a large extent on the quantity of woodland cover. Males occupy larger areas than females, and where woodland cover is scarce, the average size of a male's home range is 1500ha. In areas of extensive forest cover the figure is around 425ha. They patrol their areas and leave

droppings on the tops of large stones and in other places where they can easily be seen, to warn off intruders.

They use the same well worn paths again and again.

They make their breeding nests among rocks, in hollow trees or in a bird or squirrels' nest. They have up to five young



which are born in April. Pine martens also have a few temporary resting places (dens) within the area in which they live which they use from time to time.

Food and feeding

Pine martens are very agile and have good eyesight, excellent hearing and a keen sense of smell, all of which help them to find their prey. They are usually solitary animals and hunt alone. They sleep in their favourite den for much of the day, preferring to hunt at night.

Pine martens catch most of their food on the ground including small mammals such as wood mice, voles, young hares and rabbits. They also eat birds, frogs, insects and carrion.

They can chase red squirrels and birds such as tits and wrens through the tree tops. Any birds eaten are taken from nests. If a group of small birds spot a pine marten they become very agitated and make a lot of noise until it disappears. This is called mobbing.

Pine martens eat fruit and berries at times, especially if animal food is hard to find. They are normally shy and hard to spot but in areas where there are many pine martens they sometimes appear at bird tables. (They have a weakness for jam sandwiches!).

Pine martens and humans

Foxes, wild cats and golden eagles occasionally kill pine martens but their main enemy has been humans. At the beginning of this century pine martens were very close to becoming extinct in

Scotland. Only a small number survived in the far north-west.

The situation for the pine marten was particularly bad during the nineteenth century. Gamekeepers trapped and killed hundreds of pine martens because they ate game birds and poultry.

Pine martens were also killed for their fur which was at one time an important export from Scotland to the rest of Europe.

Another problem for pine martens was the destruction of most of their woodland habitat. Thousands of years ago a large part of the Highlands of Scotland was covered with pine and birch forests. Gradually this forest disappeared, partly due to exploitation by man and partly, it is believed, due to climatic change. As it became colder, wetter and windier it became much harder for natural regeneration to take place. Grazing by sheep and deer then stopped any new trees which did regenerate from growing to replace those that had been removed. By the 1950s much of this natural forest had gone. The loss of such extensive forests meant the loss of many of the plants and animals that lived there, including pine martens.

Pine martens today

In Scotland the number of pine martens continues to increase and they are now plentiful in some areas. Since 1988 it has been against the law to kill a pine marten deliberately.

Further destruction of the pine marten's natural habitat is being prevented as a

growing number of people work to protect those areas of native woodland that remain, to increase their size and to plant new woods. These include landowners, foresters, community groups and conservation organisations. The best remaining areas of native woodlands are protected as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) or nature reserves.

The spread of predominantly coniferous plantations has provided new areas of shelter and food suitable for pine martens. They will travel long distances and suddenly appear in areas where they were extinct. They have also been successfully reintroduced to some forests, e.g. Glentool in Dumfries and Galloway.

[Finding out more](#)

For more information about pine martens look for books about British mammals or Scottish wildlife. Your library may have:

Scottish Wildlife – Animals

Ray Collier.

Colin Baxter Photography Ltd. 1992

Wildlife of Scotland

Fred Halliday (ed). Macmillan. 1979

The Handbook of British Mammals

Eds. Gordon Corbet & Stephen Harris (3rd Ed.) 1991

[How you can get involved](#)

SNH is particularly interested in hearing from anyone who has seen a pine marten (alive or dead) outside their normal range (i.e. Highland, Argyll and north and west Perthshire). So, if you

have seen pine martens in Aberdeenshire, Angus or south and east Perthshire, or areas south of these, we would like to know where and when (except the Glentool area of Dumfries and Galloway, where pine martens were reintroduced some years ago).

Contact groups of other people concerned about the future of Scotland's wildlife. Check your local newspaper or library for information about groups in your area.

Scottish Wildlife WATCH, part of the Scottish Wildlife Trust, produces a magazine and Scottish newsletter which includes information about environmental issues and gives you the chance to help wildlife by taking part in projects and surveys.

Contact: Scottish Wildlife WATCH, Cramond House, Cramond Glebe Road, Edinburgh EH4 6NS

To find out more about visiting a forest, contact your local Forest Enterprise Office or local Countryside Ranger Service.

A poster of a pine marten is available free of charge from either Scottish Natural Heritage or the Forestry Commission. Scottish Natural Heritage, Publications Section, Battleby, Redgorton, Perth PH1 3EW

Glossary

Native woodland

A natural or semi natural wood comprising native species such as Scots pine, birch, rowan and sessile oak.

Natural regeneration

Trees growing from seeds spread by wind, birds or other natural means.

Plantation

An area of planted woodland (often used to describe a large area recently planted, predominantly with conifers).

Predator

An animal that kills and eats other animals.

Prey

An animal that is killed and eaten by other animals.

