

Pine marten *Martes martes*

WHAT IS THE PINE MARTEN ?

The pine marten is an attractive member of the *Mustelid* (i.e. weasel) family. This group of mammals possess musk glands the secretions of which are used for communication. The size of a large cat, pine martens are mostly dark brown with a cream chest and throat patch, long legs and a bushy tail. Pine martens are agile climbers and travel with a distinctive loping movement.

The name pine marten comes from their association with coniferous woodland but they can also be found in deciduous woodland, pasture, scrub, coastal sites and moorlands. Pine martens are omnivorous, feeding on small birds and mammals, eggs, beetles and berries according to the time of year and availability of food. Their home range will include a number of dens in hollow trees, amongst rocks, tree roots or in buildings.

Densities of pine martens in coniferous forests in Scotland have been shown to be very low owing to the scarcity of food, with home ranges of 6-14km². Densities in deciduous woodland in Ireland can be much higher with overlapping home ranges of less than 1km².

CURRENT STATUS:

Pine martens are sparsely distributed across northern Europe. Native to the UK, it was once found throughout the country, but its stronghold is now Scotland, where it is found in very low densities. Whilst habitat change had already affected the range and distribution of pine martens, the major decrease in population coincided with the development of sporting estates in the mid-nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century pine martens only survived in north western Scotland, North Wales and parts of northern England.

During the latter half of the twentieth century there was an extension in range in Scotland, but the distribution in England and Wales continued to decrease. Survey work in the 1990s failed either to confirm or deny the existence of a population of pine martens in England, although well-founded reports continue to suggest localised incursion into Northern England including the Pennines. There are a small number of fully authenticated recent reports in north east England.

WHY IS THE PINE MARTEN OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

The 19th and 20th century distribution of pine marten was almost entirely defined by persecution. The reasons for the continued absence of the species from areas of suitable and previously occupied habitat are not clear.

PINE MARTENS ARE AT RISK FROM:

Persecution.

Lack of suitable habitat.

Road traffic.

SUGGESTED ACTIONS

Carry out further survey work to determine the status of pine marten within the area.

Extend the area of deciduous woodland.

Provide nest boxes.

Provide supplementary feeding sites if there is shown to be a population – pine martens are known to use bird tables.

Collate records and collect road casualties for identification.