



Pine Marten

Pine Marten:

Martes martes



Distribution:

in the British Isles, the pine marten is mainly confined to remote areas of Scotland, Wales, the Lake District and Irish Republic; some isolated populations exist in eastern and south-western parts of England. Also found in rest of Europe, except southern Spain, Portugal and the Balkan peninsula.

Habitat:

woodland, mainly coniferous but found in mixed woodland too. Sometimes lives on rocky moorland and hillsides.

Description:

cat-size and slender with long, dark, chestnut-brown fur and a bushy tail; has a distinctive creamy-yellow throat.

Size:

male measures, on average, 68cm from nose to tip of tail. Female is slightly smaller.

Life-span:

may reach 10 years or more in the wild. Food: mainly small birds and mammals, including squirrels, voles, tits and wrens. Also eats beetles, caterpillars, birds' eggs, berries and carrion (dead animals).

The pine marten is a carnivorous, arboreal (tree-living) member of the weasel family. It was once widespread in Britain but now it is rare. Human interference has caused a serious decline in marten numbers over the

past 200 years, although there are now signs that the population may be increasing in certain areas.

Pine Marten Habits

Daily Life

. The pine marten is mainly nocturnal, hunting through the night and especially at dusk. It usually hunts alone. A very agile predator, it can climb trees easily, grasping the trunk firmly, digging in its claws and bounding upwards with jerky movements. The marten is one of the few predators agile enough to catch a squirrel. If it falls, its supple body twists to land safely on all four feet from as high as 20 metres! Martens, however, obtain most of their food on the ground, and they hunt for small mammals, birds, insects, berries, birds' eggs and carrion.

Martens are rarely seen in daylight; they sleep in dens hidden in a crevice among rocks or in hollows under tree roots.

Winter.

Pine martens are active throughout the winter. Those that normally live high in the hills move to lower ground during the colder months. The soles of their feet are covered in thick fur which probably helps them to move across snow-covered ground.

Breeding.

Pine martens breed only once a year, mating in July or August; the female's pregnancy does not begin until January. This is called 'delayed implantation' and occurs in other mammals too, including the badger. A litter of about 3 babies is born in late March or April, often in a nest previously lived in by a crow, magpie or squirrel. At birth, the young are blind and are covered in a thin coat of yellowish-white hair which changes to grey and then to brown as they mature. The babies spend at least six weeks in the den before they venture out and the family stays together until they are six months old.

Pine Marten Problems

Apart from man, the pine marten has no natural enemies. During the late 1800s and early 1900s it was persecuted by gamekeepers, even though it was never a real threat to game birds, and trapped for its rich fur. Destruction of the Marten's forest has also contributed to its decline.

Protection for Pine Martens

The marten is partially protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 6, which limits the methods by which the animal may be killed e.g. traps and snares are prohibited. Unfortunately, a few martens die in traps set for foxes.

There are signs that pine martens are increasing in areas where coniferous forests have been extended, providing larger areas of suitable habitat for them. This is occurring mainly in Scotland, Wales and the Lake District. It is difficult for them to recolonise areas in England from which they have completely disappeared, these being isolated from the remaining populations.

Perhaps man could help by releasing captive-bred animals into suitable forests; this is already being carried out with other British mammals such as the otter and dormouse.

All content copyright of YPTE.

