



# Pine Marten Action Plan

*Martes martes*

**UK list of Priority Species:**  
**Scottish Biodiversity List:**

**Yes**  
**Yes**

## Summary

The pine marten was once widespread but became extinct in most areas of Scotland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Persecution and loss of habitat were the main reasons for its decline. The species has recently returned from its last refuges in the north-west of Scotland to more southern parts of Scotland, including North Lanarkshire. Through improving habitat connectivity the population should further recover in this area and enable the species to expand further into its previous range throughout Scotland.

## Species Profile

The pine marten is a native species of mustelid in Scotland, which was widespread until the 18th century. After the decline of the species in most areas of Scotland, due to persecution and habitat loss, it is not the first mammalian predator with a population that is naturally recovering and returning to areas where it was once common. Improved legal protection and afforestation are the reasons why pine martens are now spreading further south. It is still considered to be Britain's second rarest carnivore.

The pine marten is the size of a small domestic cat. It has dark brown fur and an obvious cream coloured throat patch, rounded ears and a bushy tail. The pine marten's diet consists mostly of small mammals, with field vole one of its main prey species. As an opportunistic species the pine marten can also take carrion, fruit, passerine birds and eggs. As predators they are an important part of a healthy ecosystem.

Recent research in Ireland has shown that the presence of pine marten in an area has a negative effect on populations of the invasive grey squirrel. Also, in areas of Ireland where pine marten populations have naturally recovered, the native red squirrel population has also recovered. This indicates that the presence of pine marten may help the recovery of the native red squirrel in Scotland, which has been in significant decline. Research into interactions between pine marten and invasive grey squirrel in Scotland have shown that non-native grey squirrel occupancy is strongly negatively affected by exposure to pine martens. By contrast, exposure to pine marten predation has an indirect positive effect on red squirrel populations. Pine marten predation thus reverses the well-documented outcome of resource and apparent competition between red and grey squirrels (Emma Sheehy et al. 07 March 2018).

Pine martens are adapted to woodland and prefer habitats with complex three dimensional structures, a high prey abundance and structure suitable for use as dens. Pine martens can also be found in more open areas when scrub is present. Cavities in mature trees are often used as den sites, but the species also uses other structures, such as burrows in tree roots, stone piles, and where present pine marten den boxes.



Pine martens aren't confined to woodland, but each animal requires from 86 to 166 hectares of woodland within its territory.

The pine marten is predominately nocturnal, but in the summer months can be active during the day. It is solitary and excludes other pine martens of the same sex from its territory. Sub-adult individuals can be tolerated in a territory, and little is known about dispersal of young. Adult pine martens are known to travel average distances of 7km within their home range per night.

Mating occurs from June to August. The young are born in April due to delayed implantation and a post-implantation gestation period of 30-35 days. Litters are usually small with three young on average. The young reach adult size after six months but are unlikely to breed successfully in the first two years of their lives.

### **Legal Status**

The pine marten is listed on Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is illegal to intentionally or recklessly capture or kill a wild pine marten. It is also illegal to destroy damage or obstruct access to a pine marten den site or disturb an animal occupying such a site (except within a dwelling house). The species is also listed in Annex V of the EC Habitats Directive and is classified as a Priority Species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. A license from Nature Scot is required to trap pine martens.

### **Current and Future Status**

#### **In Scotland**

The pine marten is a native species to Scotland. After becoming extinct due to anthropogenic factors in most parts of Scotland, pine martens have spread from their remaining populations in the north-west Highlands. They are believed to be the first mammalian predator on a path to natural recovery to their former range and have spread northwards into Caithness and Sutherland, eastwards into Moray, Deeside and elsewhere in Aberdeenshire, through Perthshire, Tayside, the Trossachs, Stirlingshire, Skye, Argyll onto the Kintyre and the Cowal Peninsulas and to a lesser degree parts of Western Angus and Fife and the Central Belt. Expansion of pine martens from the Galloway Forest, following a reintroduction of the species in the early 1980s, has been limited. Although it has been reported that this reintroduced population may have been the source for records in Ayrshire and South Lanarkshire. The Pine Marten has been present and increasing in range in East Lothian and the borders and appear to have spread north and westward and have reached North Lanarkshire. They are present on Mull due to translocation.

The pine marten population in Scotland is the only remainder of the species' genetic stock which is unique to Great Britain. Pine marten populations in England and Wales have been lost and therefore all distinct haplotypes of pine martens in that area have been lost also. The Scottish pine marten population has therefore a unique place in the genetic diversity of pine martens in Europe as the last remaining UK haplotype. A reduction of the population would lead to a significant reduction of this particular haplotype within a European context.

#### **In North Lanarkshire**

Since first recorded in North Lanarkshire in 2014 the Pine marten has increased its range and has now been recorded throughout the Cumbernauld and Kilsyth area



including Dullatur in the north and Luggiebank in the south with the species present in all suitable habitat within this area. Pine Marten have been caught on trail cameras further south around Airdrie and Coatbridge and to the west on Croy Hill and Barhill, east Dunbartonshire as well as on the outskirts of Glasgow and in Falkirk district to the east. Surprisingly the Pine martens recovery in to North Lanarkshire is by no means limited to the southern spread from the north. They have also been recorded in the southern part of the county and have been found in and around the Shotts, Allanton and Murdoustoun areas of North Lanarkshire. This apparent separate population is part of a westward spread from the East Lothian and Borders population which is growing in size and range. That there appears to be two separate populations in North Lanarkshire bodes well for the species as a whole within the county although work still needs to be undertaken to better establish their current range and distribution. Further surveys and monitoring to expand the knowledge of the status of pine marten in North Lanarkshire would help to inform any action to protect the species.

It can be safely assumed that should these two separate populations merge the Pine marten could potentially be present within all suitable habitat in North Lanarkshire in just a few years time.

Habitat connectivity remains an issue within the central belt of Scotland including North Lanarkshire and this should be a key objective to increase migration for Pine marten. This will of course be of benefit to a range of species.

The Pine marten is susceptible to Road Traffic Accidents (RTA) and several individuals have been recovered from roads in Kilsyth, Cumbernauld, Newmains and Gadloch, Auchinloch.

Through legal protection and improvement of habitat connectivity Pine marten populations within Scotland will be able to further expand into their former previous range within Scotland, including North Lanarkshire. The Pine Martens spread thus far has been remarkable and at a notable pace. This is testament to their adaptability and ability to thrive in habitat once thought to be non-productive.

Although their preferred habitat is mature woodland they have shown that they can adapt and are able to traverse and occupy territories with a mix of habitat types including scrub, moorland and various woodland types including conifer plantation and mature broadleaved woodland.

### **Current Factors Affecting the Species**

- Habitat fragmentation resulting from development.
- Habitat fragmentation and poor connectivity effecting the spread of Pine marten to suitable habitat.
- Lack of suitable habitat in the industrialised central belt region. is stopping the species population range spreading to the south of Scotland.
- Threat of illegal persecution.
- Accidental trapping during pest control measures.
- RTA remains the main threat to spread and localised population density and increased mortality.



• Potential for secondary rodenticide poisoning. Though this may not be as high a risk to the pine marten as its cousin the polecat, due to their predilection for farm buildings and dwellings, there is still the potential for Pine Marten to predate and or scavenge rodents which have been in contact with rodenticides.

**Current Action**

- Surveys of Scotland to determine population status.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust and the Countryside Ranger Service have surveyed suitable habitat in North Lanarkshire and will continue this action to establish presence of Pine marten across the county.
- Scottish Wildlife Trust have been running a Pine marten course with local schools.
- Camera trapping and Pine marten box construction by the Countryside Ranger Service.
- Raising public awareness of the Pine Martens recovery in North Lanarkshire by the Countryside Ranger Service.
- All developments affecting pine marten habitat are recommended to have a Pine marten survey undertaken prior to development.
- Training provided to NLC Planners by NLC Biodiversity and NatureScot on the likelihood of Pine marten being present and in which habitats and developments this species should be considered.
- Reporting sighting. Find out **how to submit records of mammal sightings** on The Mammal Society website.
- Liaise with landowners and farmers on the Pine Martens recovery and potential presence within their areas.

**Objectives and Targets**

1. Conserve and enhance pine marten habitat
2. Maintain and expand pine marten population in North Lanarkshire

Action	Meets Objective Number	Action by	Target
<b>Policy and Legislation</b>			
1.1 Updated Biodiversity Planning Guidance for NLC Planning Officers and developers.	1	NLC	Provided by 2026
<b>Site Safeguard and Management</b>			



1.2 Improve habitat connectivity	1	SWT, NLC	Identify key areas by 2024. Implement appropriate habitat management.
1.3 Improve den availability through old, standing trees and den boxes	1, 2	SWT, NLC	Retention of old standing trees during any forestry works (where safe). 10 den boxes to be erected in NL in suitable areas in by 2025.
1.4 Advise owners and seek to secure appropriate management of pine marten sites	1	NLC, SWT, NatureScot	Engage with land owners where Pine marten are known to be present and provide guidance.
<b>Monitoring and Research</b>			
2.1 Camera trapping/research	2	SWT, VWT, NLC	Monitoring of pine marten population using camera traps and DNA analysis of droppings.
2.2 Monitoring of pine marten boxes	2	NLC	One annual pine marten box survey.
<b>Communications and Publicity</b>			
3.1 Education events	1	SWT, NLC	One themed education event including information on pine marten per year for school groups (SWT); one pine marten awareness event for adults per year (NLC)

**Abbreviations**

SWT: Scottish Wildlife Trust  
 NLC: North Lanarkshire Council  
 SNH: Scottish Natural Heritage  
 VWT: Vincent Wildlife Trust

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**References**

**The enemy of my enemy is my friend: native pine marten recovery reverses the decline of the red squirrel by suppressing grey squirrel populations**

Emma Sheehy, Chris Sutherland, Catherine O'Reilly, Xavier Lambin

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