

# Living with Pine Martens

a householder's guide

## About the pine marten



The pine marten is a native British mammal and a member of the mustelid family, which includes badger, otter, polecat, stoat and weasel. The pine marten is the size of a small domestic cat with rich brown fur, a creamy-yellow chest 'bib', prominent rounded ears and a long bushy tail.

Pine martens favour woodland habitats and prefer to use elevated tree cavities as breeding and resting sites. They are largely nocturnal but are frequently active during the day, especially in the summer months.

Despite being classified as carnivores, pine martens are opportunistic animals with a varied diet that includes small mammals (mainly voles in Britain), fruit (notably rowan berries and blackberries, bilberries or blueberries), small birds, insects and carrion.

As predators, pine martens are a vital part of a healthy ecosystem.

## Pine martens in Britain

Pine martens were once widespread throughout Britain but populations suffered a dramatic decline during the 19th century, largely as a result of habitat loss and persecution. By the early 20th century, the pine marten was extinct across most of England and Wales, while the Scottish population was restricted to the northwest Highlands.

Populations slowly began to recover in northern Scotland following legal protection in 1988 and pine martens have slowly recolonised many parts of their former range in north Scotland, with the species now present as far south as the Central Belt. Pine marten populations are also established in southern Scotland following a reintroduction to the southwest in the early 1980s and several small unofficial releases in the southeast in the early 2000s.

Between 2015 and 2017, Vincent Wildlife Trust carried out a successful project to reinforce the remnant pine marten population in Wales. Since then, other translocations have returned pine martens to Gloucestershire, Devon, Somerset and Cumbria.

Pine martens are now once again present in all three nations of Britain – but despite these welcome steps towards recovery, pine martens are still Britain's second rarest carnivore and need further support and tolerance to recover and thrive.

Marten Map  
Pine Marten Distribution  
(2015-2025)

### Legend

Records per 10km grid square (2015-2025)

0-1  
2-5  
6+



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December 2025

For the latest Marten Map visit  
[www.pinemartens.uk](http://www.pinemartens.uk)

## Legal protection of pine martens

Pine martens are legally protected throughout the UK. They were given full legal protection in England, Wales and Scotland in 1988, in Ireland in 1976, and in Northern Ireland in 1985.

### It is illegal to:

- intentionally kill, injure or take a wild pine marten;
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a pine marten den site (except in a domestic dwelling);
- intentionally or recklessly disturb a pine marten while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection;
- intentionally trap a pine marten without a licence (in any situation).



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For further information please refer to your relevant  
Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation

**NatureScot** [www.nature.scot](http://www.nature.scot)

General enquiries 01463 725 000 (Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm)

Email [enquiries@nature.scot](mailto:enquiries@nature.scot)

**Natural England** [www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england)

General enquiries 0300 06 3900 (Mon-Fri, 10am-4pm)

Email [enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk)

**Natural Resources Wales** [www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk](http://www.naturalresourceswales.gov.uk)

General enquiries 0300 0653 000 (Mon-Fri 9am-5pm)

Email [enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk)

Information related to the island of Ireland can be found at [www.pinemarten.ie](http://www.pinemarten.ie)

## Pine martens in gardens

Pine martens will visit gardens and may take food left out for birds, squirrels and other mammals. Wildlife can become dependent on supplementary food, so it is best to avoid feeding them in such amounts that they don't need to look elsewhere.

### Feeding wildlife

Small amounts every three or four days can provide a helping hand when natural food is less abundant — it is always best to provide wildlife with a variety of different foods, similar to that found in the wild, eg, nuts and berries along with occasional eggs are ideal, whereas jam sandwiches and sweet biscuits are not as they cause dental decay. If putting out peanut butter, check the ingredients — some brands contain xylitol, which is toxic and deadly to pine martens. Xylitol may be listed as birch sugar, wood sugar or E967.

Many inexpensive feeders have plastic rings or cages designed to deter squirrels, which may be dangerous for martens. Pine martens can get their heads into these feeders for nuts or fat balls, but the rings can come off and get stuck around the marten's neck when they pull their heads out.

These rings can cause severe skin abrasions, infections and impede eating as the animal grows, and should be quickly and carefully removed by wildlife experts to avoid harming the animal. It is illegal to intentionally trap a pine marten for any purpose without a licence so contact your local wildlife rescue centre for advice.

Pine marten with bird feeder rings stuck around its neck — these were later removed by a vet.

Pine martens may also be attracted to soft fruit growing in gardens – there are a number of ways to exclude them from the fruit, including fruit cages or electric fencing (see p8).

Birds and eggs are a natural part of the pine marten's diet and they can be attracted to bird boxes in search of food. There are several methods to prevent predation on nest boxes by mammals.

### For small bird nest boxes

Metal protective guards can be fitted over the entrance to prevent predators reaching the eggs or young birds inside. Metal plates can also be fitted over the entrances to stop predators from enlarging the entrance hole to reach inside.

### For larger nest boxes

Putting a baffle around the tree trunk or supporting pole will prevent pine martens climbing up and reaching nest cavities, nests or larger open nest boxes. If the tree canopy is connected to other adjacent trees, a baffle above the location of the cavity, nest or nest box can also be installed to prevent the pine marten from climbing downwards.

### Wheelie bins

While not a common occurrence in Britain, pine martens may be able to access food waste in wheelie bins by opening the lid and climbing in and out of the bin. Commercially available *Binstraps* can easily be fitted to household wheelie bins to prevent pine martens gaining access. An internet search will list stockists of bin straps.



A metal sheet around the trunk stops pine martens reaching the bird box.

## Pine martens and poultry

Hen houses are generally marten-proof when new but can deteriorate over time, particularly around the base. Pine martens can squeeze through a hole as small as 45mm and can enlarge smaller holes in rotten wood. Pine martens are excellent climbers and can access a hen house through a hole anywhere in the sides or roof of the structure. Although known for their climbing capabilities, pine martens are also capable of digging and chewing, so regularly check for signs of digging beneath the hen house and any fencing and chewing on the hen house.

### Making a hen house marten-proof

- Ensure that there are no holes in the hen house greater than 45mm.
- Maintain hen houses to a good standard, eg, replace any rotten wood.
- Close the hen house door during the hours of darkness after the hens have gone to roost. There are devices commercially available that are sensitive to light levels and automatically open and shut hen house entrances accordingly.
- Secure the door to prevent it being lifted by a pine marten.
- Position new hen houses at least 3m from nearby walls and trees to prevent a pine marten from jumping into enclosures.



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## Electric fencing around the hen house

The most effective deterrent against a pine marten getting into a hen house is to surround it and the immediate chicken-run area with electric poultry netting. This will shock but not harm the pine marten. To make this effective, hen houses or runs need to be a distance of at least 3m from nearby trees and walls to prevent a marten jumping down into the chicken run.

Electric poultry netting is available in rolls of 25m and 50m and is supplied with supporting vertical posts and a built-in gate. Electric current for the fence is provided using a rechargeable battery placed inside a waterproof container. The battery is placed inside the pen along with an energiser that controls the current running between the battery and the fence. The electric current is controlled by an energiser cut-off switch located outside the fence. It is important to keep the bottom of the netting clear of vegetation to prevent the electric current short-circuiting – a maintenance-free method is to use a length of damp-proof course membrane under the netting.



## Pine martens in buildings

Pine martens prefer to den in large natural tree cavities, but where these are lacking in their environment, they may use buildings as alternative den sites to rest, overwinter, or give birth and raise their young (kits). Breeding females with kits may be present from March to mid-June, with most births taking place in early April. Pine martens have been known to take up residence in a variety of buildings, including loft spaces, barns, sheds, log stores and agricultural buildings.

If you prefer pine martens not to take up residence in your property, you can help prevent this in several ways.

### Avoid encouraging pine martens to your garden

Pine martens can sometimes occupy houses after they have been encouraged into the garden by food, including on bird tables. So, unless your property is very well maintained and you are certain there are no possible access points, it is best not to put out food that will encourage them into the garden.

### Ensuring good house maintenance

Many cases of pine martens occupying houses (or other buildings) could easily have been prevented if the building fabric had been properly maintained. Pine martens are expert climbers and can easily climb up walls and get into buildings through enlarged gaps in rotten soffits or in brickwork.

Gaps smaller than 45mm can also be enlarged by pine martens to gain access to the building. Females will look for a natal (breeding) den site during the later winter months before they give birth to their young in early spring – and so the best time to inspect a building for potential access points is during the autumn when pine martens are least reliant on long-term den sites, such as those required for over-wintering or breeding.



Soffit with a potential access point for pine martens.

## What to do if a pine marten is denning in your property

Always seek advice from **NatureScot** in Scotland, **Natural England** in England and **Natural Resources Wales** in Wales (details on p4) regarding pine martens in the home, as pine martens and their dens are legally protected.

The steps you can take depend on where the pine marten is denning, ie, whether the building is a domestic dwelling or a non-domestic building.

- It is **illegal** to exclude a breeding pine marten from a domestic dwelling house without a licence.
- It is **illegal** to exclude a pine marten (breeding and non-breeding) from other buildings such as garages, sheds and other outbuildings without a licence.
- It is **legal** to exclude a non-breeding pine marten from a domestic dwelling house by following clear procedures that ensure the welfare of the animal.



### Non-breeding den

Single pine marten at any time of the year – confirmed using a camera to monitor the access point(s).

If you have a non-breeding pine marten in your domestic dwelling, you can take steps to legally exclude them without a licence (see p12).

### Breeding (natal) den

More than one pine marten during the months of March to June with noise and smells in late spring.

If you have a breeding female with young in your domestic dwelling, it is always best to wait until they are old enough to naturally leave the building with their mother on their own (usually in June) and then take steps to prevent them from accessing the building in the future (see p11). Disturbance and any attempt to remove kits from a natal den site can cause the mother to abandon her young.



Pine martens in buildings are most obvious when breeding is taking place because, as the kits grow and become mobile, they can be very noisy, particularly throughout the night or at feeding time. There may also be issues with smell and hygiene from their droppings, urine and the remains of prey that the mother has brought into the building (left).

If a pine marten family cannot be tolerated in the domestic dwelling, a licence is required and the removal of pine martens should only be done by a suitably experienced person such as an ecologist.

## Excluding a **non-breeding** pine marten from a house

**Important steps to follow** — *NB you should only attempt this if you are comfortable working at height on a ladder and you have someone to foot the ladder.*

**1** Using binoculars, assess the building for potential access points, such as holes or gaps in brickwork and woodwork (eg, soffits) – pine martens can fit through holes as small as 45mm. They could also be using adjacent walls, buildings or climbing plants to reach the access point. They may also regularly use more than one access point.

**2** Build up a picture of the pine marten's daily movements through direct observations or by using one or more motion-sensitive trail cameras focused on key locations, such as potential access points and garden feeding stations.

**3** To confirm how the pine marten is entering and exiting the dwelling, all potential access points (45mm or greater) should be blocked up by stuffing them with newspaper from the outside of the building. A loft space occupied by a pine marten is a protected den site and should not be entered. Do not attempt to permanently seal any potential access points at this time.

**4** All potential access points should be monitored over several days by observing whether the newspaper is removed – sometimes pine martens pull the newspaper into the building and sometimes it is pushed out. Often a pine marten is only using one access point, but it could be using more. This process will identify which point is used most often.



Examples of damaged soffits through which pine martens can access loft spaces.

**5** Once you have confirmed the access point used most often, permanently block all other access points with a durable material such as mortar and/or strong steel mesh to prevent access through the other access points. Continue to put newspaper in the remaining access point.

**6** Next, confirm that the pine marten has exited the dwelling through the one remaining access point. It is best if the pine marten can be seen leaving the house, but this is not always possible. The best option is to use a Wi-Fi motion-sensitive trail camera to monitor the pine marten leaving the house. Unlike traditional trail cameras that require retrieving and checking SD cards, Wi-Fi trail cameras provide real time photos/videos direct to your smart phone or tablet.



**7** If you don't have a Wi-Fi trail camera and can't see the access point from your house, you may be able to watch the pine marten from a vehicle parked in your garden or driveway. If you don't know its usual movements, start at least two hours before sunset, assuming it will emerge at dusk. Stay hidden and keep pets indoors. Otherwise, go to **8** below.

**8** You must confirm that the newspaper has been removed or dislodged from the access point to be sure that the pine marten has left the dwelling. All pets should be kept in the house at this time.

**9** When the pine marten is out of the house, ie, the newspaper has been removed or dislodged, or you have seen the animal leave, this final access point can be blocked. However, this should be done in such a way that it can be unblocked just in case an animal is inadvertently shut in the house with no way out. The access point should be covered with wood and screws (not nails) so that it can be quickly and easily opened again if necessary.

**10** With the final access point now blocked with wood, you need to listen out for noises in the loft for the next two to three hours – make sure that the house is quiet, eg, no tv or radio playing. If all is quiet and it is during the evening, it can be concluded that the pine marten is likely to be out. Listening for noise during the day is not sufficient as the pine marten may be asleep or resting. If a pine marten has been inadvertently shut in, there

will be a lot of scratching noises as it looks for a way out. If so, unscrew the piece of wood and try the process from point **6** again.

**11** If you are confident that the pine marten is no longer present in the building, carefully inspect the denning space in the house/loft to be sure that the pine marten has gone. If you encounter a pine marten during this inspection, you must immediately retreat quietly, unblock the access point, and begin the process from point **6** above again.

**12** Once you are confident that the pine marten has left the house, the final access point can be permanently blocked with building materials such as brick, stone, or strong steel mesh and mortar.



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## Providing alternative accommodation

Many woodlands lack natural denning opportunities for pine martens, such as large tree cavities found in old trees. Installing a pine marten den box in your garden or woodland can provide them with an alternative place to rest, over winter and raise their young. Further information about building and installing a pine marten den box can be found at [www.pinemartens.uk](http://www.pinemartens.uk)

If a breeding pine marten has been relocated from a domestic dwelling house under licence, or a non-breeding pine marten excluded from a domestic dwelling house, you can encourage use of the nearby den box by placing their denning material, eg, the loft insulation from the den site within the den box, and/or placing their scats (faeces) on top of the den box lid to provide a familiar scent.



## Pine Martens and Rodenticide

The use of chemical control methods, such as rodenticides, to control rodents in and around the home carries risks to humans, the environment and non-target wildlife, including pine martens. Second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides (rat poisons) are toxic and particularly harmful as they persist in the environment and can cause the deaths of non-target animals since animals such as pine martens may eat rodents that have been poisoned and will be poisoned themselves.

Prevention is always the best cure for controlling rodents, and professional advice should be sought where pine martens are known or likely to be present. Check the National Pine Marten Monitoring Programme's Marten Map for the latest information on pine marten distribution in Britain [www.pinemartens.uk](http://www.pinemartens.uk)

Follow the code of best practice for rodent control, available here: [CRRU – Think Wildlife](#)



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