**Pine Marten (Martes Martes)**

**Description**
Cat-size and slender with long, dark, chestnut-brown fur and a bushy tail. It has a distinctive creamy-yellow throat.

**Behaviour**
A carnivorous, arboreal (tree-living) member of the weasel family, which 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 and has been known to survive a fall of up to 20 metres by twisting its supple body to land safely on all four feet. Pine martens are active throughout the winter, though those that normally live high in the hills move lower ground during the colder months.

Martens are generally solitary. They are polygamous and mating normally occurs in late summer (July-August). Gestation is extended to about 9 months by delayed implantation, with the 3-5 young being born in early spring. Kits are born sparsely furred, blind and deaf. They are weaned around 2 months of age and are able to kill prey by 3-4 months, shortly before they leave their mothers. Delayed implantation ensures that the young are born at the best time of year (normally spring or summer) while minimising breeding-related activity in winter.

**Size**
Body length up to 53 cm, plus a bushy tail, which can be 25cm in length. Weight between 1.3 and 1.7 kg, with the female being slightly smaller than the male. In the wild, the pinemarten can live up to 11 years, although the average lifespan is 3-4 years.

**Where to see them**
Found mainly in woodland, particularly coniferous but also mixed woodland. Less frequently they can occur in rocky moorland and hillsides. Has been recorded as an occasional visitor on the following Scottish Wildlife Trust reserves: Loch of the Lowes, Ben Mor Coigach, Doire Donn, Keltneyburn, Knapdale, Loch Fleet and Rahoy Hills. However, the pinewoods of Strathspey and also parts of the Black Isle north of Inverness seem to be where the most regular sightings are reported.
**When to see them**
All year round, at dawn and dusk, but very elusive and are usually surveyed from signs alone (footprints and droppings).

**What they eat**
One of the few predators agile enough to catch a squirrel they never the less obtain most of their food on the ground, hunting for small mammals, birds, insects, berries, bird’s eggs and carrion.

**Status**
Listed as a protected species in Appendix III of the 1979 Bern Convention on the conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats. Also included in Annex V of the European Community’s Habitat and Species Directive of 1992, as a species “of Community interest whose taking in the wild and exploitation may be subject to management measures”. Also listed as a UK BAP Priority Species.

**Distribution**
Range extends from Europe including Scotland and Ireland, across Russia to western Siberia and from the northern limit of the boreal or coniferous forest in the north to the Mediterranean and the Caucus region in the south. They also occur on many of the Mediterranean Islands, including Majorca, Minorca, Corsica, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands and Sicily.

**Threats**
Historically persecution from gamekeepers has long been the major threat, with numbers declining dramatically in the 1800s and early 1900s. Habitat loss and fragmentation is another factor. However, in recent years there has been some evidence of recovery in certain parts of Scotland, Wales and the Lake District.

**Fascinating Facts**
The soles of their feet are covered in thick fur, which probably helps them to move across snow-covered ground. In the wild, the pine marten can live up to 11 years, although the average lifespan is 3-4 years. In captivity ages up to 18 years have been recorded.

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**References**
1: Scottish Wildlife Trust website (www.swt.org.uk)