



## Information for householders

### What is a pine marten?

The pine marten is a small mammal associated with deciduous and coniferous woodland, although it has also adapted to living in scrub. In these habitats it seeks protection from predators and food to eat. The places used by pine martens for resting, sheltering from bad weather and breeding are called resting sites and dens. Dens are usually old tree cavities but, when these are not available, pine martens will use a variety of sites such as rock crevices, burrows, bird nests, squirrel dreys and log piles. In Ireland, which is one of the least wooded countries in Europe, pine martens can sometimes use both inhabited and uninhabited buildings as den sites. A den used by a female to give birth and to rear her young is called a natal den.

### Pine martens and buildings

The presence of one or more pine martens in a building occurs most often when a pregnant female uses the roof-space as a natal den. If this happens, the young martens (called kits) may be present from March to July, although during this time only the female may be seen entering and leaving the building. Non-breeding martens may also occupy buildings but, as they make less noise and mess compared to young kits, they may go undetected. Adult martens do not live in pairs, so if more than one animal is present it will almost certainly be a female with her young.

### Problems caused by pine martens

The presence of a female marten and her kits in a building can give rise to problems of smell and hygiene, and possibly also structural damage, eg, when a female marten enlarges an existing small gap to gain access to a building. Young kits are often very quiet and may hide in the roof void, however, as they grow they become more mobile and they can be very noisy throughout the night. This problem can increase over the summer months when the female returns to the building at night with live prey for her kits so that they can practice their own hunting skills.

### What can I do if I have a pine marten family in my attic?

Due to the risk of a female marten abandoning her kits if disturbed, no action should be taken to exclude or deter a pine marten from a building between the months of March to July without first contacting the National Parks and Wildlife Service (LoCall 1890 383000) for details of your local conservation ranger. Any action to remove the martens without first consulting with your local ranger could constitute an offence under the Wildlife Acts. The ranger will be able to advise you on what can be done to alleviate the problems being caused by the martens, depending on your specific situation.

## **How do I remove a single pine marten from my attic?**

The first step is to contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service (LoCall 1890 383000) for contact details of your local conservation ranger, because the pine marten is legally protected in Ireland. The ranger will be able to advise you on the best course of action, depending on your specific situation. The following steps can be taken to remove a pine marten from your building but only when it has been established that you have a single, non-breeding marten in your attic.

- 1** Block all potential access holes (45mm diameter or greater) with rolled-up newspaper to establish which holes are being used by the marten. Do not attempt to permanently seal any potential access holes at this stage. Using newspaper to block actual or potential holes is necessary in order to establish which one is used most frequently by the marten.
- 2** Sometimes it is possible to see the hole being used by the marten by walking around the house, but if not, sit in a vehicle that provides a view of the house. You must not stand or sit out in the open as the marten may detect your presence and not emerge.
- 3** Ideally blocking up holes with newspaper should be done over several days to get an accurate record of which holes are being used; often it is only one, but it could be two or more. When the marten wants to get out, it will either pull the newspaper into the hole or push it out.
- 4** When you have identified the hole most used by the marten (ie, the one where the newspaper is always disturbed), leave this open for the marten to use and permanently block all others with a durable material such as mortar and/or strong steel mesh, so that it is impossible for the marten to get in by any of these. Continue to put newspaper into the remaining hole to monitor the marten's behaviour.
- 5** Watch the pine marten's movement around the house and garden as this often helps to build up a picture of what is going on. Does the marten have regular patterns of behaviour? Sometimes this can be influenced by the movements of pets. For example, if you have a dog that is always let out into the garden last thing at 11pm, the marten will regulate its movements accordingly.
- 6** It is best if you can see the marten leaving the house, but this is not always possible. The only way of knowing it has left is when the newspaper has been disturbed.
- 7** Once you think that the marten is outside the house, the remaining hole can then be blocked using wood and screws (not nails). Cement is not recommended at this stage in case the marten is still within the attic and the hole needs to be unblocked to let it out. It is advisable to have all the tools and materials you need ready at least two hours before sunset, because the marten will probably emerge as it is getting darker.
- 8** With the hole now blocked (with wood), you need to listen out for noises in the attic (with all TVs and audio equipment turned off). If all is quiet, you can assume that the marten is no longer in the attic. Pets must be kept indoors at this time; a dog may even be able to alert you to the sounds of a marten trapped inside the attic. If a marten has remained inside, there will be a lot of scratching noises as it seeks to find a way out. If this happens, unscrew the piece of wood to let out the animal and replace it once it leaves.
- 9** It is advisable to stop putting out bird food that is attractive to martens (eg, nuts and fruit) until the marten has been excluded for a week or two.

## **How to prevent pine martens taking up residence in your home**

Although pine martens are one of our most attractive native mammals, they do not make good house guests, as they can give rise to problems of smell, noise and even structural damage. There are steps, however, that you can take to prevent pine martens moving in.

**1** Unless your home is ‘marten proof’, do not deliberately attract a pine marten into your garden by leaving out food for it. Martens will also take food that has been left out for birds and red squirrels, so if one does start to help itself to this food, stop providing it for a few days and the marten will stop calling.

**2** Do not leave food unattended outside in pet feeding bowls as this can encourage martens to take an interest in your house and garden, and to then start looking for a way to gain access to the attic.

**3** Ensure lids of bins containing food scraps are secure. Information on how to do this can be found from the Householder section of pinemarten.ie

**4** Keep your home in a good state of repair. Remember pine martens are excellent and agile climbers, so ensure that even small gaps in external timbers are repaired – martens can squeeze through a gap of just 45mm in diameter – and will enlarge openings in rotten timber to create an access point. Always replace damaged slates.

**5** Act early to prevent a rodent infestation in your attic, particularly in October and November when mice and rats seek shelter in houses, because martens are often attracted into roof spaces in pursuit of these rodents.

**6** Always follow up unusual or one-off sounds you hear from your attic, particularly during the months of November to February. Martens search for possible denning sites during these months, although they may not move in until late spring. Be aware, however, that martens are not normally overly frightened of humans and are extremely curious; they will not always flee if you approach them in an attic for example. This makes them harder to scare away than other mammal species.

**7** If you have seen a pine marten on more than one occasion in your garden and cannot immediately repair a possible access point, placing a radio in the attic may deter it from moving in until such time as you can make your home marten proof.

## **Pine martens and wheelie bins**

Disposing of food in wheelie bins can attract animals like foxes or pine martens. To deter an unwanted visitor, it is important to ensure they cannot regularly access food from the bin.

The Binstrap was invented in Ireland to prevent animals from getting into wheelie bins. It also keeps the bin lid securely closed during stormy conditions and prevents rubbish getting into the environment and causing pollution. It was trialled on a bin that was visited regularly by a pine marten and was able to stop the animal getting into the wheelie bin.