



Contacting your local conservation ranger: case studies

There are around 80 conservation rangers working throughout the Republic of Ireland for the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), which is part of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The rangers implement the legislation and policies necessary to conserve Ireland's nature and biodiversity. They also play a key role in providing the public with advice and education about Ireland's wildlife.

Although the pine marten is still one of Ireland's rarest mammals, conservation rangers are now dealing with an increasing number of reports in some parts of the country of this animal using buildings and being seen in gardens.

The accounts recorded by the rangers cover a range of situations and include both residential and commercial properties. Although pine martens are one of our more attractive native mammals, they do not make good house guests. The rangers report incidences of pine martens rearing kits in attics, causing problems of noise and smell, killing poultry, eating food left out for birds and for dogs, and taking food from wheelie bins. They have also been ransacking food stores in canteens, ripping open refuse bags or grain bags in sheds, and opening cans of beer and bags of peanuts in a garage.

Despite the inconvenience experienced by householders, many are willing to allow kits to remain in the attic until they are old enough to be trapped and removed under licence by a ranger. In some cases, the kits can be placed in a building nearby or a special holding box, and the female will return and take them to another den within her territory. Occasionally the female will be traumatised and not return, or return and rescue just one kit.

The other action undertaken by the ranger is to provide advice to the householder to address their specific situation, for example: to repair gaps in buildings; improve poultry fencing; secure wheelie bin lids; leave a radio turned on; remove pet bowls with uneaten food from outside the house; store food in secure containers in outbuildings; and temporarily cease feeding fat ball food to the birds.

Concern about children playing outside

A recurring theme of concern was the perceived risk to children playing outside when a pine marten had been sighted in the garden, but this fear was allayed when it was explained that the pine marten was searching for food and would not remain where food was unavailable.

Wheelie bins

In one case, a householder attempted to prevent a marten taking food from her wheelie bin by placing a builder's block weighing 10kg on the lid. She subsequently observed the pine marten pushing off the block with its nose. She then fitted a Binstrap to the bin, which prevented the marten from lifting the lid. More information on Binstraps can be found from the Householders section of the pinemarten.ie website.

Radio as a deterrent

A ranger was contacted because a pine marten was seen regularly entering the roof of a building used as a creche. The roof space was inspected and it was confirmed that it was not being used by a female marten to rear her kits, so a radio was placed in the attic to deter the animal from entering. This proved successful, so it was then possible for repairs to be carried out to stop the marten gaining access.

Bird food stored in a garage

A mother contacted the NPWS because she had seen pine martens in her garage and expressed concern that they would attack her children. She was reassured that this would not happen and when her garage was inspected, a female marten and her kits were found. The householder was happy to allow the kits to remain in the garage until they were old enough to leave. It is thought that fat ball bird food was what had initially attracted the female marten into the garage as she was seen feeding these to her kits.

Noise caused by kits in an attic

On two separate occasions, a conservation ranger was contacted by householders unable to sleep at night due to the noise being caused by marten kits in the attic. Despite the inconvenience, the kits were allowed to remain at both dwellings until they were old enough to be safely trapped under licence by the ranger and released outside.

To contact your local conservation ranger:

Visit www.npws.ie or telephone using LoCall number **1890383000**