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How to tell a pine marten from a mink or feral ferret

Our native pine marten, the non-native American mink and ferret are all related and belong to the Family Mustelidae. They are known as mustelids. All three animals have a long thin body, which enables them to follow their prey down small tunnels and burrows and, in the case of the pine marten, to gain access to buildings or pens through small openings in rotted timbers or wire netting. These mustelids can be difficult to distinguish from each other, especially when they are seen only briefly and in poor light, as is often the case.




Features	Pine marten	American mink	Feral ferret
			
Fur colour	Chestnut brown	Uniform brown or black	Dark guard (outer) hairs with creamy underfur
Size	Domestic cat-sized	Smaller than a pine marten	Similar to mink
Ears	Rounded and fringed with pale fur	Uniform dark colour	Rounded and pale in colour
Throat markings	Obvious bib of creamy yellow or orange	No distinct bib, but may have patches of white on the body	Variable-sized pale throat patch
Tail	Long and very bushy	Slightly bushy	Slightly bushy
Legs	Long	Short	Short
Habitat	Woodland	Aquatic	Lowland agricultural landscapes, but flexible in habitat use

Photo credits: Pine marten (Bill Cuthbert); American mink (Henry Schofield); Feral ferret (Selbe)