



Rare Wildlife of New Hampshire

Marten

Martes americana

NEW HAMPSHIRE: THREATENED
UNITED STATES: NOT LISTED



How does it look and behave?

Marten range in length from 18-30 inches and in weight from 1.5 to 3.5 pounds. Males are larger than females.

Appearance: The marten's long, slender body is marked by a unique yellowish-orange patch on its throat and chest. It has a wedge-shaped face, short, pointed nose, round cat-like ears, and a bushy tail. Marten vary in color from dark brown to blond. The head and cheeks are often lighter than the rest of the body. Marten tracks show 5 toes in front, 5 toes on the hind foot, an indistinct heel pad, and a characteristic hairy foot.

Behavior: Marten avoid large openings or clearings. They're agile tree climbers, jumping from branch to branch as well as from tree limbs as high as 15 feet to the forest floor. Marten are active day and night in search of food to satisfy their high metabolic rate. They prey on voles, mice, red squirrels, flying squirrels, snowshoe hare, shrews, and other small mammals and eat seasonally available foods such as berries, birds, and eggs in summer, and nuts in fall.

Curious and investigative, marten were easily trapped in the past. They are bold, energetic and alert, with keen senses of smell, sight, and hearing. Like other members of the weasel family, marten emit a strong scent from their musk glands. Unlike mink, they avoid water.

Breeding: Breeding occurs in July with 1-5 young born the following April or May.

Where is it found?

Habitat: Mature conifer forests (spruce, fir, hemlock), mid- to late-successional mixed hardwood-softwood forests, areas impacted by spruce-budworm, and cedar swamps are used by marten. During summer in Maine, marten use stands with extensive spruce budworm damage (< 50% overstory canopy closure). Marten hunt for their prey under fallen trees, hollow logs, and stumps and use dead or dying trees for resting and as den sites. In winter, they take advantage of natural crevices around stumps, fallen logs and trees, and rock outcrops to burrow beneath the snow in search of prey and to keep warm.



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Range: Marten are found in the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska, south to the Sierra Nevada and Rocky Mountains. They also inhabit the northern-most areas of Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York and New England. In New Hampshire they've been observed only in the northern reaches of the White Mountain National Forest and the north country and mostly at high elevations. Although common in the Maine woods where they're still trapped, marten in NH are not trapped and are less common, yet the size of the population is unknown.

What are the management opportunities?

A landscape perspective is needed to maintain and enhance marten habitat. Recent studies in Maine indicate that marten use forested areas with >60% forest cover and trees >20 feet tall. Retaining large, closely-spaced forest patches within timber-harvested areas may reduce fragmentation of marten habitat. Extensive clear-cuts and large fires reduce use by marten for up to 15 years.

Foresters, landowners, and other land managers can follow these specific management recommendations:

- Maintain a diversity of vertical and horizontal woody structure in mature softwood, hardwood, and mixed stands, as well as in stands affected by spruce budworm. This includes snags and large, woody debris such as blow downs, dead-and-downed trees, and slash which provide food and shelter. It's important to retain a mature overstory to maintain suitable habitat for marten, although partial cutting is compatible.
- Where clear-cutting is used, smaller cuts interspersed with older forest stands will reduce fragmentation of marten habitat.
- Retain contiguous forest patches of 0.9 to 1.5 square miles (representing home ranges of females and males, respectively) in heavily logged landscapes.

What should you do if you see evidence of marten?

Record the time, date, where you observed the animal, what it was doing, and any other significant observations. Report the sighting to NH Fish and Game Department, Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program, 2 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301 or call (603) 271-2462.

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