

Nature Notes

Pine Marten-A Winter Resident



The Pine Marten is one of the kinds of weasels that can be found in the Kimberley Nature Park. Indeed, if you have seen a Pine Marten, you are one of the lucky few as this nocturnal mammal is seldom out and about when we are!

Pine Marten live in mature, northern coniferous forests. They are solitary but curious animals who use trees to pursue prey such as squirrels or chipmunks, to escape from predators such as coyotes or Great Horned Owls, and also to make their dens for their young, known as kits. Pine Marten are also known to tunnel in the snow to hunt for mice, shrews, and other small mammals. They are omnivores, eating nuts and berries in the summer as well as bird eggs and insects.



Image by US Wildlife Service

A male Pine Marten is approximately 23 inches long while the female is 20 inches long. Their weight is only a couple of pounds! They are larger than the Least Weasel and smaller than a Fisher, other members of the weasel family that are also found in the Nature Park. Pine Marten are dark brown to blond in color with paler heads and under parts. Their tail is long and bushy while their face is round with small, rounded ears. They range over a territory of several miles. In April, 1 to 5 kits are born in a leaf nest after a gestation period of 10 to 11 months. They are weaned at around 6 weeks, become independent from their mother at around 3 months, and finally mature at 15 to 24 months. Pine Martens were extirpated in some areas due to trapping for their pelts. They are now a protected species in British Columbia.



Image by Cody Connor

Pine Marten have been seen in the Nature Park in the winter but you need to look up to spot them moving on the upper branches of trees. In the snow, look for tracks that are about 1.4 in long and 1.6 in wide with a stride between 9 and 26 inches. The hair that covers the feet in winter obscures the five toe pads. The trail of a Pine Marten will show the over-lapping of the front and hind feet and while running a series of four prints

in a rough line, a space then the series of four prints which is characteristic of only this species.

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