

Encounters with the crag mart?

Dr Neil Jordan, Pine Marten Project Manager, The Vincent Wildlife Trust.

Retreating to remote craggy areas is a fantastic way to spend a weekend, but for one of Britain's rarest mammals, the pine marten, just such a retreat might have been their saving grace. Now, as The Vincent Wildlife Trust steps up its efforts to detect and conserve these rare cat-sized carnivores, climbers are being asked to keep a look out for them and to report any sightings.



A pair of young pine martens (Photo: David Whitaker)

Although typically considered a woodland animal, pine martens are also found in crags and rocky outcrops. In fact, it is even suggested that by retreating to these areas, pine marten populations were able to cling on through prolonged periods of deforestation and persecution.

Clearly, as well as providing great climbing and bouldering opportunities, these areas have something to offer pine martens too, as Neil Jordan, Pine Marten Project Manager for The Vincent Wildlife Trust, explains. “Craggy and rocky areas provide alternative 3D habitats in which martens can breed relatively safe from their main predator, the fox. Normally, tree cavities in woodlands would be favoured for this, but our woodlands are now generally lacking in old growth features, and it seems that pine martens have been seeking out alternatives”.



Crags provide pine martens with potential rest and den sites inaccessible to foxes (Photo: Neil Jordan)

Recent sightings reports collected by The VWT show clear ‘hotspots’ concentrated in and around Snowdonia in Wales, and across the north of England, particularly in Cumbria and the Lake District (where they were even known locally as ‘crag marts’), across Northumberland and in North Yorkshire. Pine martens have also been reported in the Peak district. A good number of these sightings were made on steep cliffs, and in craggy areas and rocky outcrops, so, the next time you’re out in these craggy areas, remember to keep your eyes peeled and you could be lucky enough to spy one of these elusive and spectacular mammals. You may not be the only one retreating to the crags...

To report a pine marten sighting in England or Wales or for more information on pine martens and getting involved in our work, please visit www.pinemarten.info, ‘phone 01531 636441, or email neiljordan@vwt.org.uk.

**The Vincent Wildlife Trust - specialising in mammal research and conservation
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