



**Pine Marten.**  
Photography by James A Moore

# Pine marten kits born in the wild in Wales

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## The Pine Marten Recovery Project

The pine marten (*Martes martes*) had become extinct throughout much of Britain by the early part of the 20th century. Small populations survived in the Welsh Marches and in areas of northern England, but relatively strong populations were still to be found only in some parts of the Scottish Highlands where persecution pressures were less.

Recent studies show that the pine marten in Scotland is making a good recovery. South of the Scottish border the situation is different; there has been no convincing evidence of natural recovery. The pine marten is seen as a priority species in urgent need of conservation action.

This six-year project is the culmination of more than 30 years of pine marten research and survey work carried out by the Vincent Wildlife Trust: research that has given a clear picture of the causes of the pine marten's decline and the requirements for its survival. With no recent evidence of breeding or natural recovery, reinforcement of the existing population is the only way to

restore a viable pine marten population in southern Britain.

The return of a healthy pine marten population could provide benefits beyond the re-establishment of one of our rarest and most charismatic mammals. It could help bring additional income to rural economies through ecotourism, as is the case in Scotland. In addition, recent research in Ireland has indicated that in areas where the pine marten is recovering there has been a decline in the non-native grey squirrel population thus benefiting the native red squirrel. Although no such research has been completed in the UK, a boost in pine marten numbers might just give a hand to our struggling red squirrels too.

## Breeding success

**It's official – pine marten kits have been born in Wales. The pine marten carries the title of Britain's second rarest carnivore after the wildcat, making these births a very significant moment in the conservation of this native mammal.**

At least three of the ten female pine martens brought to Wales from Scotland last autumn by the Vincent Wildlife Trust have given birth. Staff from the Trust's 'Pine Marten Recovery Project' placed remote cameras at a number of sites where they believed female martens were preparing to have young. Further investigation has confirmed a total of at least five kits.

The Pine Marten Recovery Project aims to restore a viable pine marten population to Wales and England. The project's major partners are the People's Trust for Endangered Species (PTES), Chester Zoo and Woodland Trust, with support from Wildlife Vets International and Exeter University.

In the autumn of 2015, twenty pine martens were taken from Forestry Commission Scotland land under licence from Scottish Natural Heritage and relocated to Wales where they were on the verge of extinction. The animals were released in woodland owned by Natural Resources Wales. This is a pilot project and the animals have been radio tracked daily by staff and local volunteers to monitor their movements and behaviour patterns. When some of the females' behaviour began to change it was a sign that a birth might be imminent.

A further twenty pine martens will be translocated from Scotland in the autumn and this should result in a self-sustaining population that over time will spread to other forests of Wales and across the border into England. Without this helping hand, it is likely that this native mammal would simply disappear from the Welsh landscape.



**Pine marten kits in den box.** Photograph from the Vincent Wildlife Trust. The kits are living in an artificial wooden den box made by VWT staff.

The  **Vincent Wildlife Trust**