

## The Status of Pine Marten in Newfoundland

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I wish to call to the attention of conservationists the precarious status of the Newfoundland pine marten (*Martes americana atrata* Bangs). In the past 50 years martens have disappeared from large sections of central Newfoundland. By 1960 the species' range was no longer continuous-one population was located in eastern Newfoundland in the vicinity of Gander Lake, Northwest Gander River, and Gambo Pond-Trinton Brook (Fig. 1). A second population located in western Newfoundland was concentrated between Little Grand Lake and Lloyds Lake, along the east shore of Grand Lake, and in the river valleys of Southwest Brook, Little Barachois Brook and Flat Bay Brook (Fig. 1).

The last marten sighting reported to me from the eastern population was in 1961; this population is now probably extinct. The future of the western population is not bright. At present a road is being constructed from Buchans to St. Georges, through the heart of the present range. This road will open this vast region to logging operations.

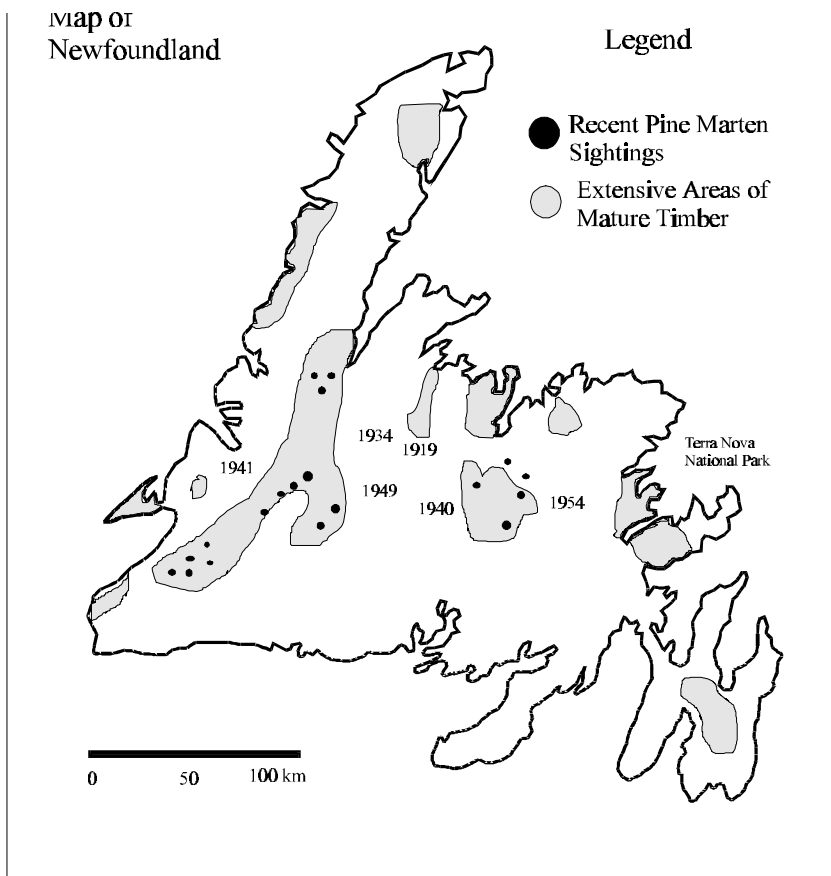


Figure 1. The distribution of marten in Newfoundland in the decade 1950 to 1960 based on the reports of wildlife officers. The years represent the approximate time of disappearance. Marten may now be extinct in the eastern section of the indicated range.

Apparently pine marten were never found in some forested sections of Newfoundland. Older residents on the Avalon Peninsula and the Bonavista Peninsula are not familiar with the species (Fig 2). Again on the Northern Peninsula north of Parsons Pond, it is not clear if the species was ever common.

The pristine range of the species appears to have been almost exclusively in the Grand Falls and the Corner Brook sections of the boreal forest as outlined by Rowe (1959). These two sections encompass the most productive forests in Newfoundland.

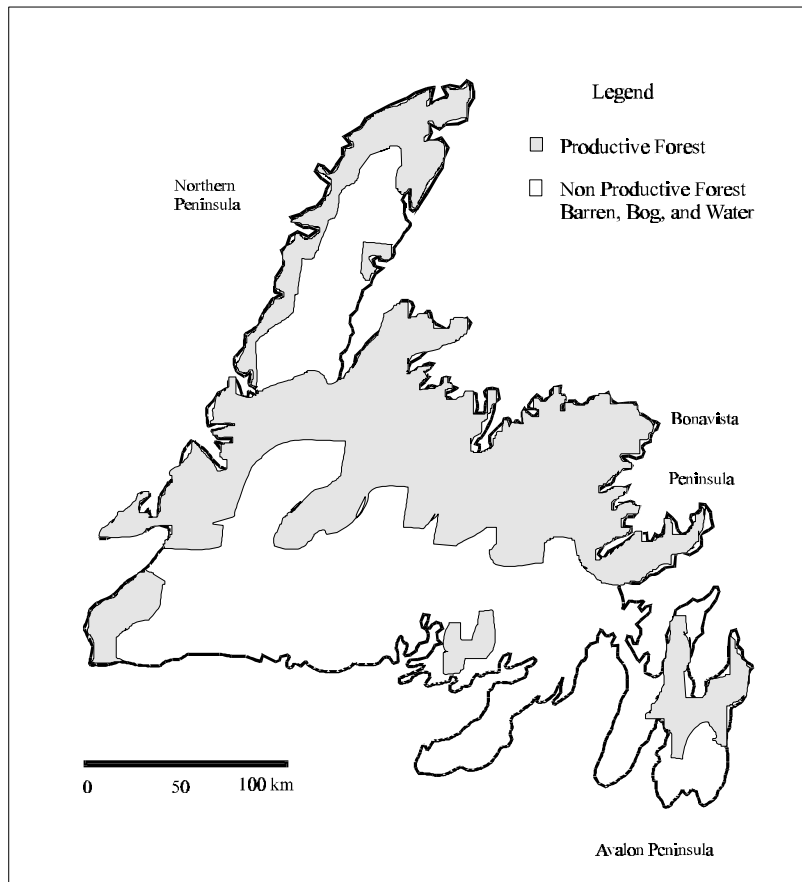


Figure 2. The original area of productive forest in Newfoundland. No records were secured of marten having ever been present on the Bonavista or Avalon Peninsulas. The species primary original range included the forested sections of the west coast (south of the Northern Peninsula), central Newfoundland and northeastern Newfoundland.

It is not known why the species did not inhabit the extensive original spruce and fir forests of the Avalon and Bonavista Peninsulas (Fig 2.). One hypothesis that I think worthy of testing is that these forested sections did not include sufficient large trees for denning and arboreal life requirements. Both the Grand Falls and Corner Brook section of the boreal forest once contained extensive stand of white pine (*Pinus strobus*); where as, this tree species was largely absent from the remainder of the Island (Rowe 1959). The area now inhabited by marten contains the last dying relic stands of diseased pine. The importance of this tree species to marten could easily be checked by following winter tracks.

The correlation between the former distribution of white pine and marten abundance could be spurious-the correlation reflecting a more basic relationship between site fertility and marten status. Marten do without pine in most of North America. However the life requirements of Newfoundland marten must be unique- there are no native squirrels in Newfoundland-and one only one native mouse species (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*). It is difficult to imagine how the species survived at all. The Newfoundland marten's food habits are unknown.

Marten have frequently been seen in newly logged areas. The animals appear quite tame. The decline of marten does not appear to be due to an aversion to man per se but rather to the logging destruction of mature forests and possibly the loss of pine forests through disease.

It is unfortunate that Terra Nova National Park does not boast a marten population and may lack suitable habitat. It is doubtful that the powerful forestry interests in Newfoundland will permit a large block of suitable habitat to be set aside for the preservation of the species.

The Wildlife Division of the Newfoundland government should undertake a life history study of the species. The first principle of the stated policy of the Wildlife Division is "...to maintain all indigenous species from extinction..." (Walters and Pike 1961:48). Now is the time to act!

### Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my appreciation to wildlife officers Arthur Butt, Eph Balsam, Norman Muise, and Samuel Kelly for supplying information on marten distribution in Newfoundland.

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