



Vermont Coverts Woodlands for Wildlife

A newsletter of Vermont Coverts: Woodlands for Wildlife, Inc.

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THE AMERICAN MARTEN IN VERMONT

Kim Royar, Wildlife Biologist VT Fish & Wildlife (Retired)



An American marten, perches in a tree. Photo courtesy USDA.

The American marten (*Martes americana*) is a small, mink-sized member of the Mustelidae or weasel family. Unlike the brown-black mink, the marten has a reddish-brown coat, a distinguishing yellow throat patch, brown legs, and little “eyebrows” that extend upwards from the corner of the eye giving it a quizzical appearance. Males are slightly larger than females.

According to one of Vermont’s earliest natural historians, Zadock Thompson, marten were once plentiful in most parts of Vermont. However, by the 1850s they were “confined to the most mountainous and woody portions” of the state. The

widespread deforestation and unregulated harvest of wildlife characteristic of the 1800s took its toll on marten.

By the early 1900s the species was deemed extinct in the state and in 1972 marten were legally classified as an endangered species in Vermont. At that time, only a few individuals remained in the northeastern part of the state where habitat connectivity with populations in New Hampshire and Canada allowed for periodic movement between high quality habitats.

Female marten are sexually mature at one and a half years. They prepare a lined nest in the cavity of a tree, a root ball or in a rock den. Marten breed any time between late June and early September. Development of the embryo does not begin until February or March. This phenomenon, known as delayed implantation, is believed to be a mechanism by which the pregnant female can abort the fertilized egg should her physical condition deteriorate through the harsh winter conditions.

Post-implantation gestation is 27 days. A litter of one to five young is born blind and virtually hairless with each kit weighing only one ounce. The young reach their full length at three months but do not gain their full weight for several months. Adult male marten do not aid in raising the young.

Marten are a species of old softwood or mixed wood forests. They prefer complex forest structure such as downed dead wood, stumps, and brush. In winter, they do best in deep fluffy snow. This allows them to access prey in the subnivean zone, underneath the snow. The downed and dead wood are critical to providing access to their prey of small mammals like mice, voles, and squirrels.

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MISSION: Together we enlist and support Vermont landowners in a long-term commitment to maintain and enhance diverse wildlife habitat and healthy ecosystems.

NOTE FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Rich Chalmers, Class of 2005 Spring



Last month we walked our property with Donna Foster* and Mead Binhammer, Project Directors with the Vermont Land Trust, for our annual site visit. I love these chances to explore our woods with resource professionals. In addition to being fun and

interesting, I always learn something new and helpful from these encounters.

Ann's and my path towards conservation started with the Coverts Cooperator Training in 2005. Our role as stewards became clearer as we continued to learn and realize the ecological importance of large blocks of unbroken forest and the role of our woods within one.

Our goal is to help transition our land from mostly open pasture of the early 1900's back to something closer to the rich, diverse old-growth-like habitat that came before.

There are many things we can do, such as creating patch cuts and leaving lots of coarse woody material in all stages of decay, to promote the kind of habitat that would support an American marten (see page 1), for example, and all of the other species that benefit from such diversity.

What we need is sound science-based information, access to resource professionals and the opportunity to learn from and with our peers. This is exactly what Coverts provides.

2023 has been a banner year for Coverts educational programming. There are 33 new graduates of the Cooperator Training, and we hosted over 40 stewardship workshops and events, including seven County Forester meet and greets reaching over 75 landowners.

More exciting programs are planned for the coming year, including a Spring Cooperator Training focused on the Shutesville Hill Wildlife Corridor in Stowe, continued workshops on passing land to the next generation and a wide array of Cooperator-hosted events.

We are clearly having a positive impact on Vermont's woodlands and wildlife!

Your support of the Coverts mission enables this kind of outreach. Please donate to the annual fund drive today. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rich Chalmers".

Rich Chalmers, President

**Donna Foster is a Coverts Cooperator (2017 Fall) and currently serves on the Coverts Council as the Secretary.*

COOPERATORS AT JOCKEY HILL FARM TOUR WITH COOPERATOR TIM STOUT



Left to Right: Ron and Bonnie Emig (2010s), Kathy Ross (2012s), Tim Stout (2014s), Kathryn Karmen (2018f), Lander Burr (2023s), Peter Gill (2018f) and Ann Vanneman (2016f)

ONCE A COOPERATOR ALWAYS A COOPERATOR

Lisa Sausville, Executive Director

At a program this year I asked all the Cooperators in attendance to stand together for a picture. A few asked, "Am I still a Cooperator?" The answer is "YES!"

If you've gone through the Cooperator Training, you are a Cooperator. Once a Cooperator, always a Cooperator. We are more like a family learning and sharing together. It is your connection to Vermont's woods and wildlife that drive our mission.

Vermont Coverts is a unique organization. We work to support landowners and others as they look to improve forest health and wildlife stewardship. We are not a traditional membership organization in that we do not collect annual dues. Instead, we conduct an annual fund drive in the fall hoping those that have been through the Training, attended our events, received our newsletters, or just care about Vermont's woodlands and wildlife will support our efforts.

Some Cooperators say, "But I don't own land anymore," while others say, "Well I haven't really done much."

Landownership is not a requirement. Many of you influence land use by being part of a conservation commission, planning commission, development review board or homeowners' association. Still others are planting pollinator gardens, learning about carbon sequestration, or sharing information with friends.

Most who say they aren't doing much are doing more than they think by posting their Coverts sign, actively

ONCE A COOPERATOR ALWAYS A COOPERATOR

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managing their own land, talking to others, sharing our posts to front porch forum, are active on one of the aforementioned boards or attend programs. There is no one right way to be a Coverts Cooperator.

Those that have gone through the Cooperator Training earn the coveted title Coverts Cooperator. This is someone who has taken the time to attend the 3-day Cooperator Training to learn, at a more in depth level, about forest management, wildlife stewardship and outreach.

Cooperators become a key part of our peer-to-peer network putting practices to work on the ground and sharing in their communities. Over 850 people have been through the Cooperator Training. It is always rewarding for me to hear comments from Cooperators noting how the experience has been life changing.

At the office we look at ways to support you. Can we help you with hosting a program? Do you need a connection to a resource professional? Are you wondering about the frost damage? Are you looking for resources to pass the land to the next generation?

Last year, we started a mentor program for recent graduates. We are starting back in with our Passing Lands Pop-ups and kicking off a project to offer additional support to landowners in planning for the passing of their lands. Be sure you are signed up for our e-newsletter so you will get all the latest news!

There are many opportunities for you to be involved, from serving on the Coverts Council, volunteering for a committee, delivering a welcome bag, or hosting a workshop. Maybe you like to write and want to pen an article for this newsletter. Perhaps you just wish to talk to your neighbor about invasive plants or attend a workshop. All of these are what we call – Coverts in Action.

Whatever way you connect we hope you remember your Coverts Training experience and recognize your connection to VT Coverts and our peer-to-peer network.

AMERICAN MARTEN

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Their smaller size also allows them to hunt on top of the snow. They have feet with fully furred soles and semi retractable claws. This may allow them to out-compete fisher for snowshoe hare and ruffed grouse in good winter conditions. However, winter rain events which have become more frequent with climate change create an icy crust on the snow which may shift the competitive advantage to the larger, heavier fisher.

Maintaining tree cover, particularly softwood cover (spruce, fir, hemlock), dead and down woody material,

and forest connectivity will benefit the marten. This is particularly true in the higher elevations along the Green Mountain spine and the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. Marten populations have also been known to fluctuate based on mast production from beech and oaks.

In recognition of the species' important ecological role the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department along with the US Forest Service worked to recover marten to the southern Green Mountains. Between 1989 and 1991, 115 marten were trapped in Maine and upstate New York. These were released in Vermont between East Wallingford and Somerset. Some of the released marten established home ranges within nearby suitable habitats, as was hoped. Others were documented to have dispersed from the region altogether.

One released animal was road-killed in Candia, New Hampshire some 70 miles away. Another was similarly found dead on the road just outside of Hartford, Connecticut 100 miles from its release site. Perhaps most surprisingly, one animal was trapped in Rangely, Maine 7 years and 150 miles beyond its release site! Initial monitoring efforts suggested that the recovery attempt had failed. Perhaps the warm winters the decade following the release allowed for competition from fisher in higher elevations.

Recent camera surveys conducted by researchers from Southern Connecticut State University offer hope. It appears that a core, reproducing, population continues to exist in and around the release areas as well as in the northeastern part of Vermont. Barring habitat loss, forest fragmentation, and continued warming, there is a chance the population will continue to grow and flourish on the Vermont landscape.

Landowners wishing to enhance their woodlands for marten might consider small patch cuts in mature forests while maintaining a large percentage of the area in softwood cover. This would create habitat for snowshoe hare, an important winter food source. Leaving downed wood is also an important component. Another strategy would be to leave mast-producing trees, particularly mountain ash, American beech, and red oak.



FUND DRIVE CHALLENGE

If VT Coverts reaches our 2023 Annual Fund Drive Goal we will receive an additional \$5,000.

DONATE TODAY!



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WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF YOUR WOODLAND?

***Do you value your woodland for wildlife habitat, timber, climate resilience, etc..?**

***Do you worry what will become of your woodland when you are no longer around to steward it?**

VT Coverts can help! If you would like help navigating the process of passing your land contact Laura Farrell (laura@vtcoverts.org).

WE CAN HELP!



**Keep Vermont Coverts growing strong!
Donate to our annual drive.
www.vtcoverts.org**