

BC's Coast Region: Species & Ecosystems of Conservation Concern

Fisher (*Martes pennanti*)

Global: G5, Provincial: S2S3, COSEWIC: N/A, BC List: Blue Identified Wildlife



Notes on *Martes pennanti*:
 This member of the family Mustelidae (including ermine, weasels and martens), is considered to form a single undifferentiated species throughout its range. Evidence suggests that the ancestors of Fisher migrated to North America during the Pliocene era between 2.5 - 5 million years ago and has changed little morphologically from the time of the last glaciation. American Marten, with which much of their range overlaps, is the only other representative of the genus *Martes* in North America.

Description

Length: 84 cm - 1.2m, **Weight:** Males 2.7-5.4 kg, Females 1.4-3.2 kg.

Like other Mustelids (weasels, otters, mink etc.), Fisher have a long slender body and a luxuriant pelage (fur). The coat is dense, dark brown to black with white tipped areas around the shoulders and back giving it a “grizzled” appearance. The tail is long and bushy, the face pointed, ears rounded, legs strong and short with heavy claws for climbing and digging. Front and rear feet have five digits, with a C-shaped palm pad curving away from the toes. The track pattern is similar to Mink and Marten but larger. Prints are wider than long, 5 cm wide on dirt, to more than 6.7 cm on snow, claws visible. As with other members of the weasel family Fisher have a gait that results in the hind foot overlapping with the front, resulting in twin paw prints one slightly ahead of the other. An agile climber, tracks may end abruptly at the base of a tree.

Diet

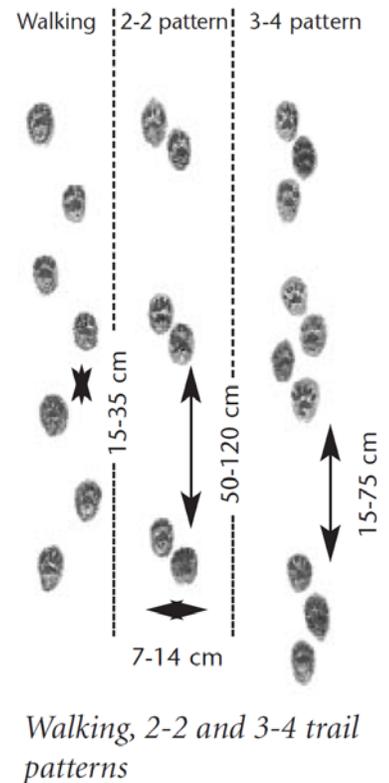
This species is an opportunistic omnivore, consuming a variety of foods and prey items including birds, small mammals, nuts, and fruits. Fisher is one of the few predators that feed on North American Porcupine and will also hunt Snowshoe Hare.

Look's Like?

American Marten, a more common relative, overlaps in range with Fisher. However, Fishers are 2-3 times larger and have distinctly different pelage colour from that of American Marten, which is a yellowish-brown to dark brown with a pale buff patch on the throat and chest.

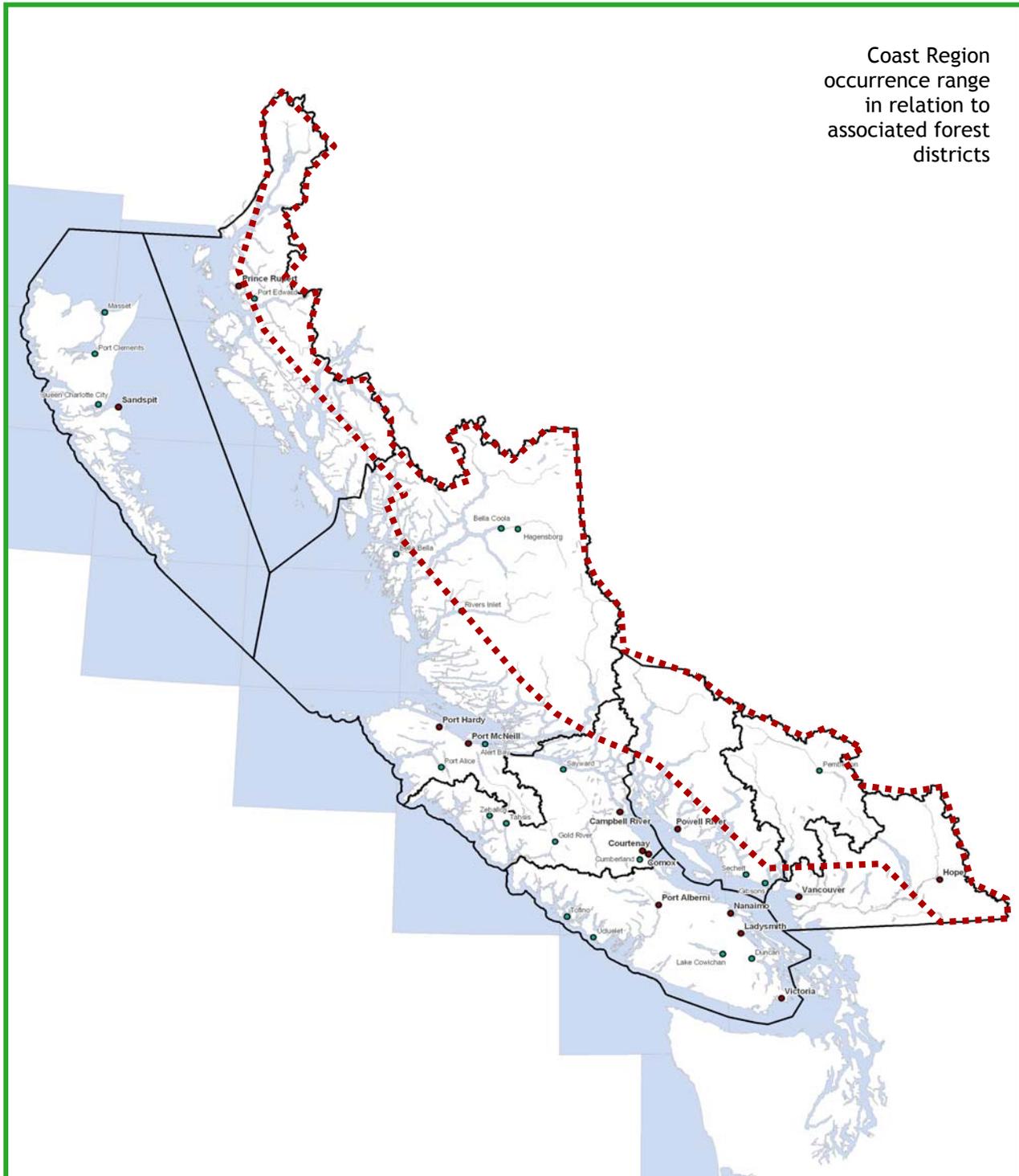


American Marten



Distribution

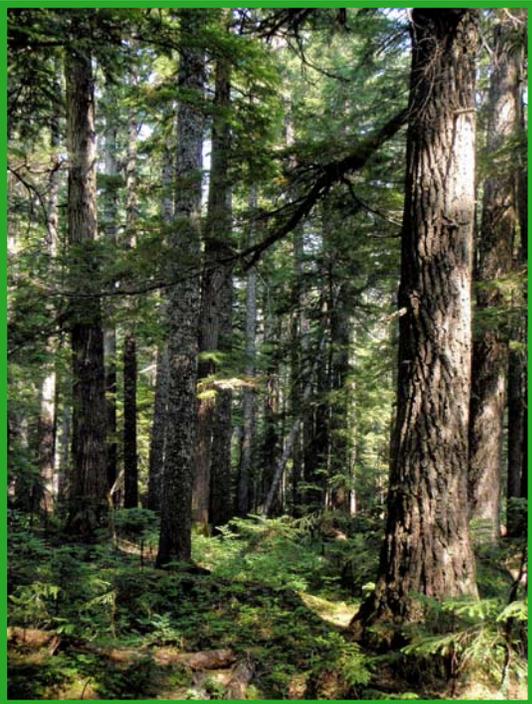
Elevation: up to 2500 m but usually <1000 m. Although present throughout B.C., Fisher are considered rare in coastal areas where any remaining populations are associated with low to mid-elevation, relatively intact, mature forested areas. Distribution on the Coast Region likely ranges from upland areas in the Howe Sound - Squamish and Lillooet Valleys, north up the South, Central and North Coast areas and then east into the Boreal Plains and Central Interior.



Fisher (*Martes pennanti*), potential occurrence range for the Coast Region

Habitat Preferences Fishers utilize habitat features both on the ground and in trees and can be active day and night. A mix of young and mature forests as well as late seral (old growth) forests with >30% canopy is preferred. This species will exploit newer second growth forests where sufficient canopy cover, structural components and prey are available.

Critical Features An abundance of large coarse woody debris (>28 cm in diameter), snags (50 cm in diameter for denning), and at least 20% shrub cover, particularly in riparian and dense forested wetland areas is essential. The natal den is usually in a hollow tree although Fisher will use underground dens if a better location is not available. In British Columbia female Fishers appear to give birth and rear kits exclusively in large diameter, declining black cottonwood or balsam poplar trees. Indirect and direct impacts to den sites can occur from logging, removal of standing, dead and downed wood, and encroachment or disturbance from backcountry or off-road vehicle and ATV use.



Fisher are a highly arboreal Mustelid. Well connected stands with an abundance of intact, structurally diverse mature forest components of coniferous and deciduous species (especially black cottonwood), are required to sustain viable populations.

Seasonal Life Cycle

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
			Breeding – *Delayed egg implantation								
		Kits born early spring – weaned by end of June									
Active – juveniles disperse over late fall-winter											

Fertilized eggs do not become attached to the female’s uterus until the following January after breeding, after which the growth of the litter begins.

Threats

- ◆ Loss of forested habitat and critical features such as denning sites is considered the main long-term threat to Fisher populations throughout its range.
- ◆ Increase in access associated with forest harvesting may increase targeted and incidental trapping and subsequent mortality, possibly diminishing local populations. Trapping can also alter the balance of reproductive age adults in local populations, potentially effective breeding success and overall population numbers.
- ◆ Resource based and extractive land use activities (e.g. logging, gas, oil and mineral exploration and extraction, hydro projects, recreational and backcountry uses) which contribute to the fragmentation, loss or significant alteration of critical habitat features and food sources.
- ◆ Fisher are particularly sensitive to disturbance from motorized backcountry recreational activities, which increase as backcountry areas become opened up after logging or similar resource extraction activities occur.

Conservation & Management Objectives

- ◆ Apply conservation and management objectives as set out in the Identified Wildlife Provisions for this species found in “Accounts and Measures for Managing Identified Wildlife - Accounts V. 2004 Fisher *Martes pennanti* and in the “Status of the Fisher in British Columbia”. Integrate complimentary objectives and practices found in “Wildlife Guidelines for Backcountry Tourism/Commercial Recreation in British Columbia”.

- ◆ Inventory and monitor using standardized methods found in Resource Information Standards Committee #24: Inventory Methods for Marten and Weasels Version 2.0.

Specific activities should include:

- ◆ Fill information gaps on breeding success and population trends to better predict the ability of Fisher to respond to changes in harvest regimes and habitat structure.
- ◆ Identify spatial fragmentation thresholds which impact foraging and connectivity requirements and reduce population viability. Based on home range sizes (which can range from 1-80 hectares) and migration/dispersal capabilities core areas of well-distributed, interconnected and seasonally important habitats are required across relatively large landscape units. Simple application of home range size without considering transient and home range overlap patterns will result in underestimation of abundance and densities
- ◆ Maintain critical densite attributes such as mature cottonwood and large diameter fir and spruce along riparian and riparian-associated habitats.
- ◆ Increase awareness about the sensitivity of the Fisher to disturbance and clearing and promote user groups and landowners to follow best management practices that limit disturbance.
- ◆ Restrict and avoid road development in backcountry areas that presently have low density road networks. For existing roads, close during critical times (e.g. breeding) and rehabilitate/decommission when relevant activities (e.g. forestry operations) cease.
- ◆ Work with the trapping sector to reduce incidental harvest of Fisher in American Marten traps (i.e., specially designed traps that exclude Fisher, changes to trapping timing etc.).

This species is Identified Wildlife under the BC Forest and Range Practices Act and subject to protections and prohibitions under the BC Wildlife Act. Trapping for Fisher is closed due to conservation concerns, trappers are encouraged to notify and submit any incidentally killed fisher to the nearest Ministry of Environment office. Habitat for this species may also be governed under provincial and federal regulations including the Fish Protection Act and Federal Fisheries Act as well as Regional and local municipal bylaws.

Content for this Factsheet has been derived from the following sources

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Every effort has been made to ensure content accuracy. Comments or corrections should be directed to the South Coast Conservation Program: info@sccp.ca. Content updated August 2010.

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