

## Newfoundland Marten Gaining Ground through Stewardship



Photo by John Gosse, Parks Canada

The Newfoundland Marten is a genetically and geographically distinct animal. Its numbers decreased during the 20th century due to habitat loss, trapping, and snaring. In 2000 it was classified as endangered. In 2007 the population had increased sufficiently that the Newfoundland Marten was re-classified as threatened. Now there are increasing signs that marten are returning to parts of their historic range on the Island of Newfoundland. The Newfoundland Marten is gaining ground through stewardship!

Over the years, many people from a variety of organizations have been contributing to the recovery of this animal. Since 2012, Intervale has been coordinating the work of 60 volunteers, who help establish the locations of marten across its forested habitat in Newfoundland. The methodology was developed by researchers in the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Environment and Conservation, Wildlife Division.

Marten are seldom seen, which is why an attraction method is needed. The technique is non-invasive and does not harm the animal. Volunteers collect hair samples by means of a wooden apparatus called a hair snag; it is shaped like a three-sided box and open at both ends. The device is fastened to a tree at chest height, baited with sardines, and made attractive to marten with the scent of skunk. If a marten visits the box, a tiny sample of its fur is left on sticky tabs that line the inside of the box. Volunteers monitor the boxes every 10-14 days, collect the hair samples, and send them to the Wildlife Division. Researchers test the samples for DNA, a process that enables them to confirm the presence of marten and to track individual animals.

From 2010 through 2015, a total of 269 hair samples have been collected, of which 47 have tested positive for marten. In 2015 alone, volunteers successfully collected 95 hair samples, which were sent for identification. From these data, researchers are able to identify each sample representing marten, the sex of the animal, and whether it represents a new animal or one that has been sampled before. As more people become involved, the data keep growing and wildlife biologists are able to determine that marten are gaining ground. The map pictured shows where marten have been confirmed. The areas in red have been expanding over time.

Thanks to greatly improved land use planning, the adoption of best management practices by trappers, wildlife management, and public knowledge, marten distribution and abundance are increasing. However, continued support for marten recovery efforts are needed. Intervale is helping the Wildlife Division in this work, through the continued efforts of staff and volunteers and by encouraging the best management practices among forest users in general. For example, Intervale is encouraging best practices among snowshoe hare snarers, instructing trappers on how to build and use floating mink box traps, giving presentations to youth and adults, and distributing informational materials such as placemats. These educational efforts contribute to fewer marten being accidentally caught in snares and traps and enable people to more about how they can contribute to recovery of marten.

