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Why raccoon presence is no reason to panic – results of a long-term field study in Germany

Poster

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Abstract

The North American raccoon is an introduced carnivore species in Germany and one of the most omnivorous mammals worldwide. This and other alien species can play a significant role in the ecological balance of their newly encountered biotope, particularly if their habits overlap and compete with those of the native animals. Due to a vast increase of raccoon numbers over the last years, a controversial discussion arose regarding the influence of the new inhabitants on indigenous and especially protected species, as well as the potential transmission of diseases and parasites. As a component of the Union list of invasive alien species, the procyonid is heavily demonized and instrumentalized by the media. However, extensive evidence-based knowledge about the actual consequences of raccoon settlement, primarily in natural landscapes, and the possible occupation of an ecological niche is still lacking. Aiming to elucidate the wildlife biology of this introduced species, a long-term and integrated research project was conducted from 2006 to 2017 in the northeastern area of distribution (Müritz National Park, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; www. projekt-waschbaer.de). In 16 different sub studies and by telemetric control of 69 raccoons, profound data on the population biology in the allochthonous distribution area was collected for the first time. In depth investigations regarding the nutrition ecology and parasitology were conducted with scat analysis as the most informative approach. Based on the hypothesis that raccoons may affect local stock of ecological relevant species through predation, raccoon faecal samples (n=1280) were collected and analysed with regard to nutrition ecology (frequency of occurrence and consumed biomass) and endoparasite infestation. This is so far the only study where raccoon prey categories were linked to available resources in the study area, which is a prerequisite for assessing local impact. The poster highlights the ecological background of raccoons in Germany and shows the correlation between predation and potential influence.