



1st EUROPEAN RACCOON COLLOQUIUM

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

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KEYNOTE:

Causality or correlation – why only long-term studies on raccoons yield meaningful data on the ecological impact

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Abstract

The North American raccoon is an introduced carnivore species in Germany and one of the most omnivorous mammals worldwide. 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. Despite being a component of the Union list of invasive alien species, 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). The Müritz National Park has been colonized by raccoons since the late 1970s and is an ideal habitat for raccoons due to its abundance of water and old deciduous trees. The overarching goal of this wildlife biology study was to collect valid population biology data in order to provide a basic ecological characterization of the raccoon from a conservation and species protection perspective (Michler 2018). Based on superordinate topics (including among others spatial and social behaviour, reproduction, population structure and dynamics, epidemiology, feeding ecology & parasitology) and 16 subprojects, unique insights into the population biology of raccoons in Europe could be obtained. In depth investigations regarding the nutrition ecology and parasitology were conducted with scat analysis as the most informative approach. 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 (Michler 2020). The talk highlights the ecological background of raccoons in Germany and shows the correlation between predation and potential influence.

References

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