

Raccoon progression in the Walloon Region (Belgium)

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Native from North America, the raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) has been observed in Europe since the '30ies. Feral populations have established in the wild from escaped individuals out of breeding farms (fur) in Eastern and Northern countries (Germany, Ouzbekistan, Azerbaïdjan, Bielorussia, Northern Caucasus, Denmark...). Today, despite hunting control, raccoon populations are still increasing in those countries, from which individuals may emigrate towards neighbouring areas.

Up to recent years, the raccoon was rarely observed in Wallonia. However, the number of dead specimen found along roads and the quantity of tracks reported from the field (alluvial forests) by naturalists and scientists are steeply increasing since 2006. Today, observations are especially numerous near the German and the Luxembourg borders.

Although potential impacts of the raccoon on native biodiversity are poorly documented, it is often included in black lists of invasive species in Europe. Its predation activity may affect aquatic molluscs, amphibians and ground nesting birds. Species expansion in Belgium should be limited and population density should be reduced as much as possible in areas where populations of rare and threatened species occur (pearl mussel, hazel grouse, etc.).