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Conference Abstract

Home Stretch or Dead End? Limits and Opportunities for Raccoon Management in Germany

Berit Annika Michler[‡], Frank-Uwe Michler[§]

‡ Johann Heinrich von Thünen Institute, Federal Research Institute for Rural Areas, Forestry and Fisheries, Institute of Forest Ecosystems, Braunschweig, Germany
§ Eberswalde University of Sustainable Development Department of Wildlife Research, Wildlife Management, and Game Management, Eberswalde, Germany

Corresponding author: Berit Annika Michler (berit.michler@thuenen.de), Frank-Uwe Michler (frank.michler@hnee.de)

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Abstract

The North American raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) has become one of the most widespread non-native carnivores in Europe, with Germany representing the core of its European range. Its ecological flexibility, omnivorous diet, and pronounced adaptability to human-modified landscapes have enabled raccoons to colonize a wide range of habitats, including forests, agricultural landscapes, and increasingly urban environments (Fischer et al. 2024). This expansion has triggered ongoing debates about appropriate management strategies, particularly regarding the effectiveness and objectives of hunting as the primary control measure.

In Germany, raccoon management is largely based on sustained hunting pressure. Annual harvest numbers have increased continuously over recent decades and now reach several hundred thousand individuals per year. Despite these high hunting bags, raccoon populations continue to expand in both distribution and local density (Fischer et al. 2015). This apparent discrepancy raises important questions about the effectiveness of hunting as a population control tool for a highly adaptable and reproductive species. Ecological characteristics such as flexible habitat use, high reproductive potential and

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compensatory population responses can limit the long-term effectiveness of hunting-based control efforts (Beltrán-Beck et al. 2011). Consequently, increasing hunting intensity alone may not necessarily lead to population reductions at larger spatial scales.

At the same time, raccoons are frequently perceived as a major threat to native biodiversity, particularly through potential predation on birds, amphibians and other small vertebrates. However, empirical evidence for substantial population-level impacts remains limited (Michler et al. 2023). Although documented risks to human health in Europe remain comparatively low, concerns about zoonotic disease transmission have received considerable attention, too (Stope 2023).

These uncertainties complicate the formulation of clear management objectives. While hunting is widely promoted as the central management instrument, its practical outcomes often remain poorly evaluated. Moreover, raccoon populations have become increasingly established in urban and suburban environments, where hunting is often restricted or impractical, further limiting the effectiveness of this approach as a stand-alone management strategy. Given these limitations, raccoon management in Germany may benefit from a more differentiated and evidence-based approach. Instead of focusing exclusively on broad population reduction through hunting, management efforts could place greater emphasis on targeted conservation measures for particularly vulnerable species and habitats.

The case of the raccoon illustrates the broader challenges associated with managing established non-native wildlife species. Effective management will likely require adaptive strategies that combine scientific evidence, targeted conservation measures and realistic expectations regarding the achievable outcomes of hunting-based population control.

Keywords

Raccoon, Procyon lotor, management, challenges

Presenting author

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Conflicts of interest

The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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