

Pilot study on the immigration of the raccoon (*Procyon lotor* L., 1758) into Rhineland-Palatinate

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The raccoon had been introduced into Germany and parts of Europe from North America eighty years ago. Harvest figures show the population hot spots are still concentrated around the initial release sites e.g. in Hesse or Brandenburg. In Hesse over 16.600 raccoons were harvested in 2008/2009, which represented approximately one third of the national hunting bag. In the same time in the neighboring Rhineland-Palatinate only 71 harvested individuals were recorded which represented only 0,13 % of the national hunting bag. These low but steadily increasing records indicate that colonization is still in progress. The South West of Germany offers good habitats for this omnivorous procyonid preferring broad-leaved forests as well as the edge of human settlements. So far field research on the ecology of non native raccoons in Europe focused on established populations. In this pilot study we try to capture and radio-tag pioneers at the edge of the current distribution range to learn more about the patterns of initial settlement. First results indicate that intentional release or escapes of numerous pet raccoons might influence this process.