

Raccoon

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Species Description

Scientific name: *Procyon lotor*

AKA: common raccoon, northern raccoon

Native to: Central and North America

Habitat: Woodland, urban areas, forests, agricultural lands

The raccoon is a medium-sized member of the order Carnivora, with a stocky torso and short limbs. A distinctive black eye mask and a ringed bushy tail makes it easily recognisable.

This species originates from central and North America. It was brought into Europe in the mid-20th century for the zoo, pet and fur trades and has since escaped into the wild. It is now present in 20 EU member states and is considered common and widespread in Germany. Raccoons can survive in a wide range of habitats where they can have a severe impact on biodiversity. Although not present in the wild Northern Ireland, escapes from captivity are likely pathway.

Under the Invasive Alien Species (Enforcement and Permitting) Order (Northern Ireland) 2019 it is offence to intentionally keep; breed; transport to, from or within Northern Ireland, use or exchange Raccoon; or to release it into the environment.



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Key ID Features

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Posteriorly curved spine giving roundish appearance



White lines immediately above and below mask

40 - 70 cm in length

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Incisors, canines and molars reflect omnivorous habits

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Feet are pentadactyl (5 toes), with no webbing. Each toe has a sharp curved claw

Mask extends from above eyes and flares out along cheeks

Report any sightings via; CEDaR Online Recording - <https://www2.habitas.org.uk/records/ISI>, iRecord app or Invasive Species Ireland website - <http://invasivespeciesireland.com/report-sighting>

Impacts

The raccoon occupies an entirely new ecological niche. It is an opportunistic species with a diverse diet which can hunt on the ground, in water and in trees. In areas where *P. lotor* becomes overabundant, their behaviour can have negative impacts;

- predation on a wide range of vertebrates. Ground-nesting birds, such as waterfowl, may be particularly vulnerable,
- transmitting certain diseases; such as canine distemper or raccoon roundworm (*Baylisascaris procyonis*). A wide range of avian and mammalian species have been documented as potentially affected by *B. procyonis*,
- they can carry diseases such as rabies, raccoon roundworm (*B. procyonis*) and leptospirosis which can impact on human health and domesticated animals,
- they can also have agricultural impacts; in Japan they are known to eat crops and predate on carp.

Distribution

P. lotor has achieved such a great invasion success because of its flexibility and capability of adjusting to different environmental conditions. Although it settles in almost every kind of habitat, including partly open and marshy grounds and urbanised areas, it prefers old deciduous stands, adjacent to water. Populations studied in Germany are mainly located in two habitats: housing estates and mixed forests. During the first 60 years of presence in the European teriofauna the range of *P. lotor* was restricted to Germany and France and its numbers remained stable. However in recent years the number of raccoons has increased dramatically in urbanised areas.

Similar Species



P. lotor (raccoon) may co-occur with *Nyctereutes procyonoides* (raccoon dog), a member of the Canidae family that also possesses a black mask and a body type similar to *P. lotor*, but have no ringed tail. The raccoon dog is also an invasive non-native species.



Nyctereutes procyonoides
paws have 4 digits



P. lotor paws have 5 digits, front footprint resemble that of a human hand



References and further reading:

Bartoszewicz, Magdalena & Okarma, H. & Zalewski, Andrzej & Szczęśna, Justyna. (2008). Ecology of the Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) from Western Poland. *Annales Zoologici Fennici*. 45. 291-298.

Bartoszewicz, M. (2011): NOBANIS – Invasive Alien Species Fact Sheet – *Procyon lotor* – From: Online Database of the European Network on Invasive Alien Species – NOBANIS https://www.nobanis.org/globalassets/speciesinfo/p/procyon-lotor/procyon_lotor.pdf

CABI datasheet *Procyon lotor* (raccoon) available at <https://www.cabi.org/isc/datasheet/67856>

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.