



THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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Exploring the impact of Invasive Alien Species on Europe's Red List Species

Policy relevance

The EU is boosting efforts to enforce the Invasive Alien Species Regulation as part of its 2030 Biodiversity Strategy. The goal is to minimize and eliminate the introduction of these species in the EU, and to actively manage existing ones to reduce their impact on Red Listed species by 50% under Commitment 9 of the EU Nature Restoration Plan. The European Red List is a review of the status of European species according to IUCN Regional Red List guidelines. It identifies those species that are threatened at the European level. Each Red List assessment notes the direct threats to a species using the IUCN Threats Classification Scheme which includes 12 categories with a specific category addressing IAS.

EU Nature Restoration Plan: key commitment 9

There is a 50% reduction in the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species.

Impact of IAS in Europe

In different parts of the world, IAS affect threatened species to varying degrees. Antarctica has the highest level of impact, with 52% of its threatened species affected, followed by North America at 41.1% and Oceania at 38.4%. In Europe, around 18% of the threatened species are impacted by IAS¹. Of the 1,872 species now considered threatened in Europe, 354 are under threat from IAS. IAS not only harm nature and the economy but also contribute to the spread of infectious diseases, posing risks to both humans and wildlife. Without effective control measures, the invasion rate and associated risks to our environment and health will keep increasing. Native threatened species, already facing challenges from factors like climate change, habitat loss, or diseases, are particularly vulnerable to the negative impacts caused by IAS.

¹ Smith, K. 2020. The IUCN Red List and invasive alien species: an analysis of impacts on threatened species and extinctions. IUCN

Examples:

Muskrats

Muskrats, being mainly herbivores, can impact native wetland vegetation through grazing, affecting the structure and composition. This has downstream effects on aquatic invertebrates and fish nurseries. Additionally, they pose a threat to endangered species like the freshwater pearl mussel through predation. The burrowing activities of muskrats can disrupt drainage and land reclamation, posing a risk to dikes and drainage systems. The economic consequences include damage to crops, irrigation systems, roads, railways, dams, and flood protection systems.

Racoon

As a medium-sized generalist predator, raccoons have a broad impact on various native species, especially in wetland habitats, posing threats to amphibians, birds, and their nests. They also affect agricultural activities like orchards, vineyards, and chicken farms. Additionally, their nuisance activities involve raiding garbage and causing damage to buildings by using roof spaces and basements as dens. Raccoons carry diseases and parasites, including rabies, roundworms, and toxoplasmosis, which can be a concern for human, livestock, and domestic dog health.

Racoon dog

Raccoon dogs are omnivorous predators that can potentially impact various native species, with concerns particularly focused on amphibians, birds, nests, and invertebrates, although the severity of some impacts remains uncertain. There's evidence of competitive interactions with other medium-sized predators like foxes and badgers. Minor impacts on agricultural activities are also noted. Raccoon dogs carry diseases and parasites, including rabies, roundworms, and sarcoptic mange, raising concerns for human, livestock, and domestic dog health.

Ruddy duck

The primary impact of the ruddy duck is its hybridization with the globally threatened white-headed duck, native to Europe. This hybridization is a major factor contributing to the decline and potential extinction of the white-headed duck. Enforcing legal provisions to restrict the pet trade and private keeping of ruddy ducks is preventing new introductions. Creating awareness about the negative impacts of ruddy ducks is crucial for gaining public support, considering potential opposition due to their aesthetic appeal.

The significant role of hunters in IAS management

Hunters play a crucial role in the management of IAS like muskrats, raccoons, raccoon dogs, or ruddy ducks. They collaborate closely with wildlife management authorities to share information, data, and to participate in coordinated efforts to effectively manage and control invasive species. Hunters also contribute to monitoring populations and reporting observations, providing valuable data for adjusting management strategies as needed. Public awareness campaigns, in which hunters participate, help educate communities about the negative effects of these invasive species, garnering support for management efforts. For concrete projects and examples see:

<https://www.biodiversitymanifesto.com/category/invasive-alien-species/>