

The Raccoon dog (*Nyctereutes procyonoides*), what kind of animal is this? And why isn't it allowed in the Norwegian wildlife?



The raccoon dog is an omnivore of the same size as a red fox, but with shorter legs and tail. The color and drawings is quite similar as on the raccoon, and from this you have the name. And I have to mention that this animal is a cute little dog like creature, which could easily have been one of my own pets. Just look at how cute and furry it is!



It originally came from Asia (Japan and China especially). It was imported to the former Soviet-Union and from there it migrated into Finland. From Finland it traveled to Sweden and to the northern parts of Norway. Now it's also found in the south part, it is hard to discover since it rather escapes or play dead when it's threatened. The raccoon dog was imported from Asia to Russia for fur farming purposes, we also have fur farming in Norway but I haven't heard of any use of raccoon dogs. So actually the spreading is a human made problem.

There is a lot of research regarding the Raccoon dog, especially on the spreading of it and the different diseases that can be carried by this dog. Among all this diseases the bearing of the

rabies disease is frequently discussed. As Norway is free from rabies, can this be one of the reasons why we don't want the Raccoon dog in Norway?

The raccoon dog is abandoned from Norway, as this animal quickly adapts to new habitats it could easily fit in our nature, one way or another. It prefers temperate climate and dense vegetation, we have dense vegetation and it can regulate to the climate with its nice (and attractive) fur. It also learns to live near us humans; in areas near humans it also uses human garbage as a food source. How positive that is for the animals I cannot tell, but I choose to believe that it's more negative than positive. So why can't this cute raccoon dog live in our Norwegian wildlife? Is it too similar to other species or does it harm some of the still existing species?

The raccoon dog is a monogamous species, a pair shares the same home, fodder and they also protect their territory together. Both the male and the female take part in raising the cubs. This makes it easier for them to take care of their cubs, and the survival rate is better. They are hibernating animals, sleeping throughout the whole winter, and they don't say no to used caves from other animals. The size of the territory is dependent on the abundance of food and season of the year, and they are gladly shearing with other species. In this way the raccoon dog compete or share with the red fox and the badger when it comes to territory. And also in the food niche it competes with other animals. They are omnivorous and eat everything from berries to small rodents. In the autumn the wild berries is most important, to make an energy reserve throughout the winter. But as they are generalists their diet consists of what's easiest available.

Of the red fox, badger and the raccoon dog, the raccoon dog have the widest niche; this naturally makes competition between the species. What will happen in the case of migration and settlement of the raccoon dog in Norway?

And as mentioned before there are also some competition in niche between raccoon dog, red fox and badger. They eat the same food, and the raccoon dog uses the others cave in the winter. But the influence on these species is not the biggest concern, since they don't overlap totally in their choices in niche.

A typical place for the raccoon dog to settle is near the water, with dense vegetation. And near the water there also are a lot of birds nesting on the ground, naturally the eggs and the chicks become an easy target. This can have a great impact on these colonies. This is one of the worries if it migrates to Norway, they are afraid that the impact on ground nesting colonies will be so big that they will be an extinct species

Norway is also a rabies free country, and they are afraid that if we legalize the raccoon dog they may introduce this disease again. This will then have an influence on both animals and humans.

But what about the climate change? In Norway the winters are becoming shorter, and the temperature increases, this is just an advantage for the raccoon dog. And it will be harder and harder to prevent the spreading in the future.

From the convention of biological diversity, Norway has committed to prevent importation (migration) of alien species. And like this, the sweet canine did come on the so called “black list” of species. It’s important to preserve the country’s wildlife if other “original” species is in danger of being extinct. All the reasons I’ve mentioned above were given when they black listed the raccoon dog. The most important reasons was the carrying of different diseases we do not have in Norway, and that it can threaten the ground nesting birds (some which also can be near extinction) in their territories.

#### Resources:

- [http://finnmark.miljostatus.no/msf\\_themepage.aspx?m=4360](http://finnmark.miljostatus.no/msf_themepage.aspx?m=4360)
- <http://www.caninescorner.org/topics/dogfur/whatareraccoondogs.htm>
- <http://www.jstor.org/pss/3682881>
- DN-rapport 2008-2: Handlingsplan for mårhund(*Nyctereutes procyonoides*)
- Raccoon dogs in Norway – potential expansion rate, distribution area and management. Zoologisk rapport 2007-3 by: Claudia Melis, Hanne Nordgård, Ivar Herfindal, Kaarina Kauhala, P-Å Åhlen, Karl Birger Strand and Reidar Andersen

#### Research papers:

- Kaarina Kauhala & Eero Helle (1995) Population Ecology of the Raccoon dog in Finland: a synthesis
- Summer Food Composition and Food Niche Overlap of the Raccoon Dog, Red Fox and Badger in Finland  
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