

STATUS OF NON-FLYING MAMMALIAN POPULATIONS

FFH Focus 4

As with most other species groups, mammals are influenced by human activities: fragmentation of habitats, pollutions, introduction of invasive species, etc. A monitoring program of populations (conservation status, distribution, habitat use) of 15 mammalian species protected or concerned by the Berne Convention and two invasive alien mammalian species (northern raccoon and raccoon dog) is conducted in Wallonia⁴.

Approximately 1,750 badger setts recorded

Although slow progression is noted north of the Sambret-Meuse line, most of the badger population is found south of it. A progressive completion of the inventory of the setts made it possible to list about 1,750 of them (as of 01/01/2016). Following a decrease in numbers recorded in 2009², a sample of setts covering the natural range of the species was selected to carry out standardised and recurrent monitoring of the population. No significant variations were observed between 2010 and 2016, reflecting population stability. According to the extrapolation method applied, numbers in Wallonia are estimated at around 5,000 (2014). Regarding the problem of damage caused by wildlife to crops³, compensation for damage in maize plantations attributed to badgers in 2012 amounted to almost €400,000 (compared to an average of €118,000/year from 2008 to 2011 and €46,000/year on average from 2014 to 2016). The level of damage in 2012 did not match the potential impact of the population of the species in Wallonia and was therefore overestimated⁴. In order to improve estimates of damage attributable to badgers, a standardised assessment methodology has been developed by ULg⁵.

Restoring the habitat of the otter

In 2015, an inventory of potential habitats for the otter was carried out on 11 water courses. Compared to previous years, two additional rivers were monitored (Western Ourthe and Amblève). Mapping techniques were applied to define the sections with connectivity problems (10.9% and 7.2% of the linear length of these two rivers respectively) and should

help guide the implementation of restoration actions.

Nearly 330 indications of the presence of other mustelids⁶ recorded

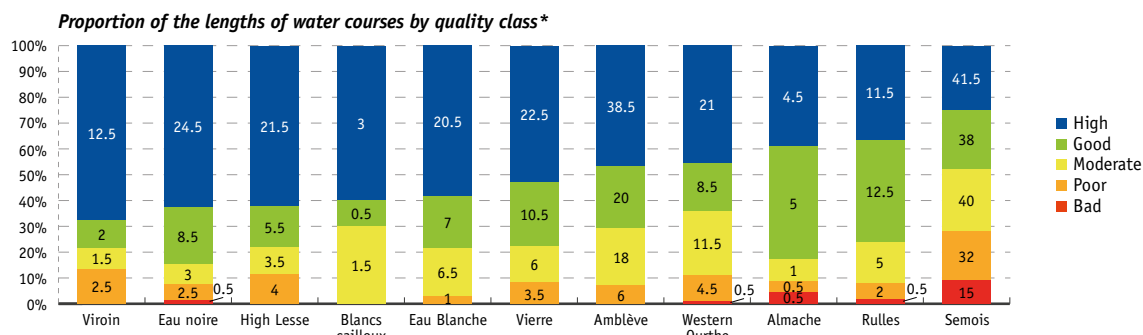
Among the other mustelids, the majority of the presence indices⁷ collected from 2011 to 2016 by ULg were attributed with certainty to the pine marten (143) followed by the Western polecat (136), two species considered to be of Community interest⁸. The presence of the pine marten was confirmed in Walloon Brabant and Hainaut where it had not been previously recorded.

Thwarting the secrecy of small mammals

The collection of presence indicators for gliridae⁹, which are very discreet, small in size and hibernate for long months, is complex and involves the placement of nesting boxes for them and the search for nests and hazelnuts that have been specifically nibbled. Specific surveys carried out since 2010 have made it possible to collect data on the location of hazel dormouse, a species considered to be of Community interest⁸, in the provinces of Liège and Hainaut¹⁰. Since 2013, the presence of this species has been confirmed in more than 130 sites.

[¹] SPW - DG03 - DEMNA; ULg | [²] Impacts of winter severity and road traffic | [³] → FFH 11 | [⁴] Confusion with damage caused by other species | [⁵] ULg - Zoogeography unit, 2017 | [⁶] Pine marten, beech marten, Western polecat, stoat and least weasel | [⁷] E.g., signs of paw tracks, droppings or dens, observation of live or dead animals. | [⁸] → FFH 6 | [⁹] Edible dormouse, garden dormouse and hazel dormouse | [¹⁰] Population disconnected from the known natural range of the species

Fig. FFH Focus 4-1 Quality of 11 Walloon water courses according to their potential for accommodating otters (2015)



* The lengths of water courses (km) by quality class (numbers noted inside the rods) are defined by mapping the structures found in the field which are favourable for the species.