

Dravsko polje – another observation of the raccoon dog *Nyctereutes procyonoides* (Gray, 1834) in Slovenia

Dravsko polje – ponovno opažanje rakunastega psa *Nyctereutes procyonoides* (Gray, 1834) v Sloveniji

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In the early hours of 27. 6. 2012, I was driving from Podova to Brunšvik. When I was approximately 3 km SE of Rače (Dravsko polje), in close vicinity of the Gauss–Krüger coordinates Y: 555690, X: 144030 (lat: 46.4383, long.: 15.7199), a raccoon dog crossed the road in front of the car. The animal was about the size of a red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*), but had a shorter tail. The colour of the fur was mostly grey and brown. The most reliable sign that I was indeed dealing with a raccoon dog was the dark face mask on its head. It was different than the face mask of a badger (*Meles meles*), since the badger has black stripes placed vertically over the eyes, while the raccoon dog has a dark mask around the eyes. Also, the animal had a dark coloured head and not white, like a badger. The landscape where I spotted the raccoon dog was highly agricultural and thus different from its preferred habitat, which is wet and open: damp meadows and forests, with sparse canopy but abundant undergrowth, marshlands, river valleys and gardens (Kauhala & Kowalczyk 2001). However, raccoon dog may occupy various habitats from continuous forests to open agricultural landscapes as well as suburban areas (Kauhala & Kowalczyk 2001). The few kilometres distant wetland forest around Rače Fishponds may provide quite suitable habitat for the species.

Whether the observed putative raccoon dog was a vagrant, a resident in this area, or if it escaped from captivity still needs to be verified. According to Vrezec (2007), this observation is fourth confirmed record of the raccoon dog occurring in Slovenia, and since all sightings have been made in different parts of the country, we may expect more encounters in the future. The raccoon dog is an invasive species in some parts of Europe and

locally may be a significant threat to waterfowl and amphibian populations (Kauhala & Auniola 2001). It may also be an important vector of rabies, sarcoptic mange and trichinellosis, and is a potential carrier of *Echinococcus multilocularis*, a parasite dangerous to humans (Kauhala & Kowalczyk 2001). Therefore we must carefully monitor reports on its distribution as well as signs of its reproductive population. If necessary, appropriate measures to prevent further spreading of this non-native species should be taken as well.

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References

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