

## Current status of the European beaver population in Poland

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After the Second World War the first beavers appeared in Poland on the Marysza and Czarna Hancza rivers in Suwalki region and on the Hwozna and Lesna rivers in the Bialowieska forest primeveal. The growth of the population was supported by migrating beavers from the neighbouring countries: Russia, Lithuania and Bielorrussia which facilitated increasing the number of the animals to 130 in 1958. In 1977 the estimated population of beavers was 1 thousand animals living in 254 families, mostly in Northern-Eastern part of Poland. In 1994 it was estimated that there were about 2 thousand lairs all over Poland with 7,4 thousand beavers in total.

The Active Protection of the Beaver program was initiated in 1974 in order to return the species to Polish fauna, extending their habitat and improving environmental conditions. In 30 years about 2 thousand beavers were captured in Suwalskie region and moved to the Vistula and Odra river-basin. Due to the reintroduction and active protection of the animals, beavers can be found nowadays in entire Poland, except high mountain ranges of the Carpatia and Sudety mountains, and their population is estimated at 40 thousand. The most numerous population with over 18 thousand animals and the density of 20 or more animals per 100 square kilometers is in the Northern- Eastern part of Poland, namely in Podlasie, Mazowsze and Warmia and Mazury regions, with most of the animals coming from the natural migration from the Niemen and Pergola rivers.

The population in Wielkopolska Region, on the Warta and Notec rivers as well as in the Bieszczady mountains, Sandomierska valley and the San river-basin, the result of the earlier reintroduction (80s and 90s of the last century), as well as the oldest population in Suwalki region, are growing according to Riney-Caughley model with the progressive initial increase in the number of animals even by 20% and then the decrease to 3-5% in a year. These populations are hybrid, established with Bialorrussia and Woroneski beavers, nevertheless belonging to the same sub-species of *Castor fiber vistulanus* Matschie, 1907. Genetically dominant animals with brown pelts (aguti) constitute above 50% of the population.

The losses in the population are small and do not exceed 1%. Most often beavers are killed by cars and during the spring migration when the young are seeking a new territory and a mate. In the Eastern parts of Poland, in the Bieszczady mountains, Augustow, Bialowieza and Knyszynska forest primeveal the beavers are killed by wolves. In May-June 2010 many young animals died in floods. There are no incidents of poaching noted in the last decades.

Till 2004 the European beaver was a strictly protected species in Poland. Protection was also extended over some of the habitats, thus 8 nature preserves covering the area of 5.174 hectares were created.

Currently, the beaver is a partially protected species and in some circumstances, such as extensive damage done by the beavers, the animals are shot or captured and moved to other regions of Poland. No shooting or capturing can be done without the permission from the Regional Directorate of Natural Environment Protection. The use of Conbear and other traps is forbidden.

**Keywords:** European beaver, *Castor fiber*, status, management