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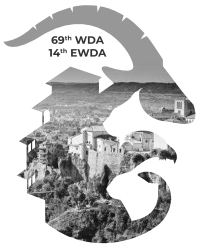
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324 ACTUALIZATION OF THE FERAL AMERICAN MINK (*NEOVISON VISON*) DISTRIBUTION IN EUROPE: A POTENTIAL RISK SPECIES FOR SARS-COV2

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Abstract Text

Besides being a threat to conservation, the American mink (*Neovison vison*) also has the potential to play a crucial role in the ongoing pandemic, as it was demonstrated to be a susceptible host for a mutant version of the SARS-CoV-2 and capable of transmitting it back to humans. This virus can potentially be present also in feral specimens.

Despite control and eradication plans, the American mink is still quite widespread in the continent and there is lack of information about its distribution, with the last mapping in Europe dated 2006. The aim of the project was to gather information about the presence and distribution of this species, creating a harmonized map of Europe, pointing out the trends over the years and the issues concerning harmonization of population data.

In the frame of the ENETWILD project, we managed to collect information about the presence of American mink in all the western European countries and most of the eastern ones. Data were harmonized from different sources and spatial resolutions, grouped by year and transformed in 10x10km grid of presence and absence. Maps were compared to outline changes over time. We took Spain as a model for a more detailed work, where data of captures were related to capture effort: allowing a density index to be created that gave a better picture of the situation. We also reviewed the European current mink farming situation and the existence of control schemes for feral populations.

This information will be extremely useful for risk assessment at a European level: it could represent the basis for coordinating the efforts to control a still spreading species with a relevant health interest. Moreover, the issue of a harmonized data collection for wildlife species clearly emerges as key element to implement to obtain better quality and more useful data.