

## Mammals

Shallow water overgrown with rushes and sedges stand out as the richest in number of different species of small mammals. Among the most valuable small mammals is the river shrew. The small fauna set is complemented with weasels, ermines, polecats, hedgehogs, mice, and field-voles. Bats have found a comfortable living space here. They hide in tree-holes, attics, bunkers, and wooden sheds. They are all strictly protected. 8 different species of bats have been noted in the Park.

Numerous populations of beavers and otters live in the Drawa National Park. Our most handsome mammals are present in the forests: deer, roe-deer, and wild boar. Beech-woods by Drawa are the wild boar's mainstay. However, a tourist can see their feeding grounds – where they look for chrysalis, seeds, and acorn sprouts – almost everywhere. Sporadically, one can see elk walking through the Park area. In the fields, but also in the woods, one can often see a hare. Relatively popular are fox, polecat, and marten. Several families of badgers living in the park have mysterious night life-styles. Three foreign species, farmland refugees, found home in the DNP forests: raccoon-dog that came from the east, muskrat from the south, and raccoon from the east. The wolf is a legendary element of the DNP fauna and used to be still present here in the beginning of the 20th century. Nowadays wolves appear here only sporadically, when they travel between their mainstays in the Drawa Lake District and the Noteć Wilderness. There is a hope, however, that they will eventually return to the Park to stay.

44 different species of mammals have been noted in the DNP area.

### **OTTER *Lutra lutra***

Showing a significant fall in numbers in many countries of Western Europe, otter is now considered endangered or disappearing. This situation looks more optimistically in Poland. Otter is still present in the entire country's area, and there has even been a small rise in its numerousness. In the DNP area, otter is present on the entire stretch of the rivers Drawa and Płociczna. It has been observed in most of the Park's lakes, as well. Otter's living area is usually rather large. One specimen usually penetrates the river and its tributaries on the stretch of 10km and more. The necessary minimum for one specimen is either 5m of a river or 2-3km of lake coast. Such small areas happen rarely, however, and only in river fragments bordering with fish-ponds very rich with fish. A male's territory is usually larger – over a dozen kilometers of river. Often within that territory there is a smaller area used by the female with her young. By researching of otter trails, the DNP otter population has been estimated to about 14 – 18 specimens, from which 7 – 8 are probably females living in their own territories. The rest were males or unknown specimens, possibly migrating through the Park, or having as their place of abode areas outside of the

Park. To measure the actual status and living areas of otters is, unfortunately, a very difficult and subjective task.

Among the found otter trails are remains of the fish they eat: bream, roach, and perch. Aside from that, pieces of lobster shells were often present in the otter droppings found near Lake Ostrowiec.

### **BEAVER *Castor fiber***

Until the 18th century beavers were present in almost the entire Polish territory. In the 19th century they almost completely disappeared. In the post-war times, the 1950's, they reappeared in the drainage basin of River Czarna Hańcza. They were specimens migrating from beaver reserves in the former USSR (River Niemen). Gradually the expansion progressed from the drainage basin of River Pregoła to Lake Oświn and through River Leśna to the Białowieża Wilderness. That spontaneous expansion had been supported by importing beavers from the USSR area and from the developing National Science Academy research institute in Popielno and an experimental station of the Poznań Agricultural Academy in Stobnica. As the result of these undertakings and the progressing of natural expansion, 1883 beaver families (about 7400 beavers) were present in Poland, and the European beaver population had been estimated to be 304 935.

Beavers inhabiting the present Drawa National Park area come from the introduction process conducted by the Zoology College of the Poznań Agricultural Academy in the years 1974-1982. The closest to the Park borders introduction of a beaver family took place on 30 September 1978 on a Drawa fragment near Krzyż. They were beavers taken from a wild population in the Suwalsko-Augustowska Wilderness. In 1982 this station was still occupied by a family of 4-5 beavers, and a gradual expansion of beavers to the nearby areas, such as Mierzęcka Struga, was noticed. Beavers have probably reached the Park area by the year 1990 and in several years they had overtaken the lower fragment of Drawa with its tributaries Cieszynka and Runica. A beaver inventory taken in 1998 had found 20 beaver stations in the Park. By researching their trails and the intensity of feeding, one could assume that 18 of those stations were occupied by families, while the remaining 2 - by single specimens or couples. On the basis of this observation the entire DNP population of beaver had been counted to be 74 to 78 specimens. The density of beaver stations in the Park has been estimated to be 18,1 per 100km<sup>2</sup> and is similar to the long standing beaver population of 18,3 per 100km<sup>2</sup> in the Suwałki region. Some newly populated areas in that region are less dense (11,9 per 100km<sup>2</sup>). Considering these facts, one can assume that the Drawa population has been stabilized and reached the capacity of this area.

The typical living area for one beaver family is a fragment of river bank or lake coast from 0,8 to 2,5km long.

In the controlled river banks and lake coasts, the beavers have been utilizing a wide range of tree species as their autumn and winter food. The most wanted ones are poplar and willow, then - birch, beech, oak, ash, hazel, service-tree, and hawthorn. Much more rarely can one see a chewed-up alder, pine, or spruce.

Despite having reached significant numbers in Europe, the European beaver is still

considered as endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

### **WOLF *Canis lupus***

A population of wild wolf had been present in the Drawa Wilderness until the late 1960's, and single specimens could be seen still in the 1970 in the Wałcz area. After 1980 the Polish population of wolves became more numerous, also in the western parts including the Drawa Wilderness near Drawsko and Złocieniec and the Noteć Wilderness with Karwin, Międzychód, Wronki, Potrzebowice, and Pniewy. In that period there even was a small number of wolves acquired by hunters. At the same time the forest rangers have noticed a positive effect of the wolves' presence which resulted in a smaller number of trees damaged by the deer. Despite of including wolves under a strict preservation rule in 1992, they have disappeared from these areas. After 1993 they have only been noted in Drawsko Pomorskie. On 21.05.1998 an adult wolf hunting rodents has been seen by the northeastern Park border. This makes it possible to assume that the return of wolves to the Park might happen in the near future

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