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DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION GROWTH OF EURASIAN BEAVER (*Castor fiber* LINNAEUS, 1758) IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA 10 YEARS AFTER REINTRODUCTION

RASPROSTRANJENJE I POPULACIONI RAST EVROAZIJSKOG DABRA (*Castor fiber* LINNAEUS, 1758) U BOSNI I HERCEGOVINI 10 GODINA POSLIJE REINTRODUKCIJE

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Abstract

Beaver is a semiaquatic mammal which inhabits suitable watercourses and water surfaces covered by rich vegetation of woody and herbaceous species. In the past, it inhabited large areas from south to the north European mainland, but in the early XX century, there were only six isolated autochthonous populations left. The reason that led to the complete extinction of Eurasian beaver in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the same as in Europe - excessive hunting.

Thanks to the actions of the beaver reintroduction to former habitats across Europe at the beginning of the XXI century, the beaver is again spread over a wider area. In Bosnia and Herzegovina beavers were reintroduced in 2005 and 2006, thus making it the 26th country that has helped to increase the number of beavers. With the reintroduction of the beaver on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it became protected species.

In the period from 2009 to 2016 a total of 964 records about the presence of beavers was collected. Currently on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina there are at least 43 registered families and eight individuals (singles). Having in mind that on average three individuals per family were registered, the real abundance of beaver in Bosnia and Herzegovina could be approximately 140 individuals.

Key words: abundance, Bosnia and Herzegovina, distribution, Eurasian beaver, population growth, reintroduction.

1. INTRODUCTION / UVOD

Eurasian beaver (*Castor fiber* Linnaeus, 1758) is a semiaquatic mammal which inhabits suitable habitats which are represented by watercourses, water surfaces and their watersides covered by rich vegetation of woody and herbaceous species. Many paleontological data and archaeological sites indicate the continued presence of beavers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but also in the region (Ćirović et al., 2007).

The Eurasian beaver once inhabited large areas from south to north European mainland,

but in the early XX century, there were only six autochthonous isolated populations with a small number of individuals (the river Rhone (France), the river Elbe (Germany), southern Norway, the river Neman, in the Dnepr basin in Belorussia (wetlands Priojat) and river Voronezh in Russia) (Nolet, 2000; Halley et al., 2012). In Asia there are also only three populations (two in Siberia and one on the China-Mongolia border) also with a small number of individuals. Excessive hunting was followed by habitat destruction (Kitchener, 2001; Halley et al., 2012). Those negative factors led to the reduction of the distribution area and therefore the number of populations. Despite to all the efforts that have been made regarding the revitalization and protection of beaver populations in Europe, it has continued to have status of more or less endangered species.

The reason that led to the complete extinction of Eurasian beaver in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the same as in Europe, i.e., excessive hunting (Salvesen, 1928; Ćirović, 2009; Trbojević, 2012). There were several reasons for increased exposure of this species to constant hunting pressure: the belief in the healing properties of certain parts of the body (primarily *castor sacs*); products from glands were used in cosmetic purposes (still used in manufacture of perfumes); quality of fur; meat is used in diet (Bajomi, 2011); church allowed castor meat to be consumed during fasting period (Ćirović, 2010).

Consequently, all relevant international conventions listed the species as threatened and in need for protection. The most significant legal provisions which classify beaver as endangered species are: Bern Convention (Appendix III) (Council of Europe, 1979) and EU Habitats Directive (Annexes II and IV) (Council of the European Union, 2013). According to those acts and considering the degree of threat, there is an obligation for signatories to take measures in order to protect and restore the populations of Eurasian beaver, as well as the habitats they occupy. In addition to the protection of species, habitat protection measures are equally important for the survival and growth of beaver as species. Thanks to the actions of the beaver reintroduction to former habitats across Europe at the beginning of XXI century, the beaver is again spreading over a wider area with relatively acceptable population sizes. According to the IUCN's latest data (for 2006), the European beaver population is estimated at a minimum of app. 635,000 individuals with increasing trend (IUCN, 2008), while some authors give the much higher numbers, even 1.4 million (Halley et al., 2012).

Reintroduction of beavers in the former Yugoslavia has also been very successful:

- In Croatia, the beaver has disappeared in the late XIX century, and again returned to the 1996–1998 under the project: "Beaver in Croatia" (Grubešić & Krapinec, 1998; Grubešić et al., 2001);
- In Slovenia, beaver immigrated from Croatia, in 1998 to Radulje (Krka) and in 2002 to Dobličica (Kryštufek, 2003);
- In Serbia, it was reintroduced in 2004 in Obedska bara, and then introduced in Zasavica 2005 (Ćirović et al., 2003, 2007, 2009);
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was reintroduced in two places: in Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FB&H) 2005 - on the river Semešnica (Kunovac & Hadžić, 2005) and in the Republic of Srpska (RS) 2006 - on the river Sokočnica (Trbojević & Seksen, 2009, 2011; Trbojević, 2012).

With the reintroduction of the beaver in the area of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it became permanently protected species in RS (Zakon o lovstvu RS, 2009) and seasonally protected species in FB&H (Zakon o izmjenama…, 2014).

As beavers often modify their natural environment by building dams, at some places in Bosnia and Herzegovina they are considered as pests or even invasive species. However, the activity of beaver makes water systems healthy and in good condition. Their work is crucial in formation of wetland ecosystems,

which in turn is used by many other species (Hägglund and Sjöberg, 1999; Baker et al., 2005; Rosell et al., 2005; Dalbeck et al., 2007; Ciechanowski et al., 2011).

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / MATERIJAL I METODE

Bosnia and Herzegovina is located in the southeast of Europe, in the central part of the Balkan Peninsula. There are two key river basins in Bosnia and Herzegovina: The Black Sea basin (Sava, Una, Vrbas, Bosna, Drina and its tributaries), which covers an area of 38 719 km² and has 7 947.7 kilometers of watercourses longer than ten kilometers, while in the Adriatic basin (Neretva and Trebišnjica) which covers an area of 12 410 km² has 1 063.8 km of watercourses, so a total of 9 011.5 kilometers of watercourses longer than 10 kilometers.

The starting points for the analysis of the distribution of beaver in Bosnia and Herzegovina were the places where their reintroduction was made (in RS on river Sokočnica and in the FB&H on river Semešnica). Given the knowledge of the migratory movements of beavers on the rivers borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina with Croatia and Serbia, attention was focused on these areas. For these reasons we have carried out surveys with local hunting and fishing associations, reviews of the hunting magazines and daily newspapers. After we set up a possible extent of the beaver territory we started the field research. Registered built lodges, dams, and traces of gnawed woody vegetation were marked by GPS (Garmin, eTrex Vista HCx) and compared with hunting and daily periodicals and collected personal information about the species. All data were sorted and entered into a database, which we used for the creation of distribution maps. The map was made in the program QGIS. The number of families was presented in relation to the number of found active lodges and beavers family sighting. Active lodges (populated lodges) were differentiated from the storage lodges by their visible arrangement (the new amount of trees and mud piled on active lodge, especially in late autumn), or by noise which comes from the interior of an active lodge (scratching, squealing or blunt noisy kicks - probably tail kicks). Population growth was presented graphically.

3. RESULTS / REZULTATI

By analyzing data about the presence of beavers in certain territories collected from hunting and daily journals, interviewing, field work and data about the locations of dams, lodge, dens and traces of logging, in the period from 2009 to 2016, we collected a total of 964 data. The results are: 183 records of direct beaver presence (beavers in groups - families, sightings of individual beaver and mortality), 49 lodges (31 active and 18 storage lodges), six dens in the ground, 54 dams and 672 cut down trees.

From the above observations, for determining of presence of beavers, account has been taken of: the observation from 40 data about presence of beavers in groups – families, 31 active lodges, six dens in the ground and eight sightings of individuals. Only on the Drina River findings of the lodges and dens in the ground were not confirmed, but sightings of at least 6 families and 1 individual on 6 locations have been documented. Therefore, these records were taken into account in the calculation of the total number of beaver families in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Currently, on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina there are at least 43 registered families and eight individuals (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Registered presence of beavers in Bosnia and Herzegovina to 2016 / **Tabela 1**. Registrovano prisustvo dabrova u Bosni i Hercegovini do 2016. godine

Location 1 (settlement)	Location 2 (rivers)	Year of colonization	Type of colonization	Presence of individuals / families in 2016
Donji Vakuf	Semešnica	2005	reintroduction	1 family
Donji Vakuf	Semešnica	2005	reintroduction	3 families
Donji Vakuf	Semešnica	2005	natural spreading	1 family
Bugojno	Vrbas	2005	natural spreading	1 family
Kalin	Vrbas	2005	natural spreading	1 family
Šipovo	Sokočnica	2006	reintroduction	1 family
Šipovo	Sokočnica	2006	reintroduction	1 family
Šipovo	Šušanov potok	2006	natural spreading	1 family
Šipovo	Sokočnica	2006	natural spreading	1 family
Mrkonjić grad	Sokočnica	2006	natural spreading	2 families
Šipovo	Pliva	2006	natural spreading	1 family
Šipovo	Pliva	2006	natural spreading	1 family
Šipovo	Janj	2006	natural spreading	1 family
Tržac	Korana	2006-2012	immigration from Croatia	1 family
Voloder	Čava (Baštra)	2006-2012	natural spreading*	individual
Kostajnica	Una	2006-2012	immigration from Croatia	individual
Bihać	Una	2007-2011	natural spreading*	1 family
Amajlije	Drina	2008-2009	immigration from Serbia	2 families
Janja	Drina	2008-2009	immigration from Serbia	1 family
	Drina	2009	natural spreading**	individual
Šepak	Drina	2009	natural spreading**	1 family
Kozluk	Drina	2009	natural spreading**	1 family
Zvornik	Drina	2009	natural spreading**	1 family
	Drinjača	2009	natural spreading**	individual
Glodi	Drinjača	2009	natural spreading**	1 family
Dolac na Lašvi	Lašva	2009	natural spreading ?	1 family
Koprivna	Sana	2010	natural spreading*	1 family
Štrbci	Ukrina	2010	natural spreading*	2 families
Petoševci	Vrbas	2010	natural spreading*	1 family
Hrustovo	Sanica	2011	natural spreading*	1 family
Bosanska Krupa	Krušnica	2011	natural spreading*	1 family
Novi Grad	Una	2013	natural spreading*	1 family

Location 1 (settlement)	Location 2 (rivers)	Year of colonization	Type of colonization	Presence of individuals / families in 2016
Novi Grad	Japra	2013	natural spreading*	1 family
Lužani Novi	Ukrina	2014	natural spreading*	2 families
Novi Grad	Una	2014	natural spreading*	individual
Prijedor	Gomjenica -canal	2014	natural spreading*	1 family
Bronzani Majdan	Gomjenica	2015	natural spreading*	1 family
Dabar	Dabar	2015	natural spreading*	1 family
Šipovo	Pliva	2015	natural spreading*	1 family
Šipovo	Janj	2016	natural spreading*	individual
Srbac	Vrbas	2016	natural spreading*	1 family
Banja Luka	Suturlija	2016	natural spreading*	individual
Novi Grad	Una	2016	natural spreading*	1 family
Gornji Ribnik	Ribnik	2016	natural spreading*	1 family
Gornji Ribnik	Ribnik	2016	natural spreading*	individual

Note. * - natural spreading from the immigrated individuals from Croatia; ** - natural spreading from the immigrated individuals from Serbia / **Napomena**. * - prirodno širenje imigriranih jedinki iz Hrvatske; ** - prirodno širenje imigriranih jedinki iz Srbije

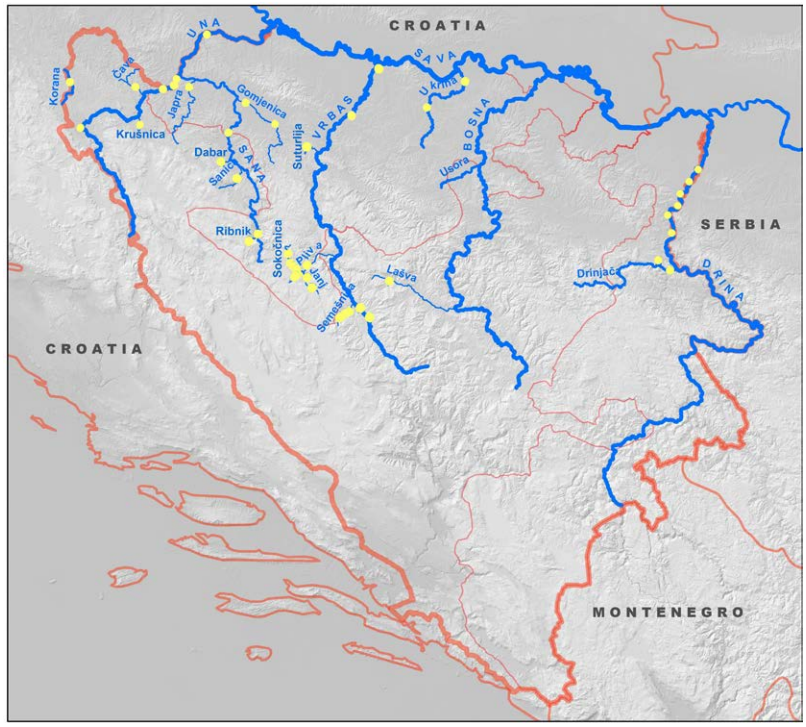

Figure 1. Distribution of Eurasian beaver in Bosnia and Herzegovina / **Slika 1**. Rasprostranjenost dabrova u Bosni i Hercegovini

The average number of individuals seen in the families is three. The largest seen family had five individuals, found on the river Ukrina, while the highest number of families was recorded on the river Sokočnica – six. Five families live on the river Semešnica. On the river Pliva we registered three families, on the river Janj one family and one individual, and in the upper stream of the river Vrbas two families.

River Sokočnica, Semešnica, Pliva, Janj and upper stream of Vrbas now represent the origin places for beavers in Bosnia and Herzegovina. On these rivers, as of 2016, there are a total of 17 families and one individual, which makes 39.53% of all registered families and 12.5% of all registered individuals (singles) in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The remaining 60.47% of the registered families and 87.5% of registered individuals (singles) makes the immigration part of the beavers population.

In the catchment of Vrbas River we registered the largest number of beavers: 19 families and two individuals. Next is the catchment of Una River - 11 families and four individuals, then Drina River with seven families and two individuals, river Ukrina (right tributary of Sava River) - four families, Korana River with one family and catchment of Bosnia River with one family. In addition to these data, on the Sokočnica River the largest built lodge was registered (1.88 m high, 5.35 m wide and 6.20 m long) and dam (82 m in length, an average of 1.65 m wide and 0.98 m average height). For the construction of dams and lodge beavers, in addition to mud and gravel, use woody plants, usually branches of aspen (Populus tremula) and hornbeam (Carpinus betulus), and for feeding the bark of beech (Fagus sylvatica). The outermost traces of gnawing and storage were up to 86 meters from the river course, also on the river Sokočnica. Altitude at which active lodges were found ranged from 87 m/asl (Vrbas estuary) to 831 m/asl (source of the Sokočnica).

3.1 Population growth / Rast populacije

For the assessment of population growth of the beavers, data was collected from 2009 to 2016 with the addition of data on reintroduction from 2005 and 2006. Data was collected from hunting and fishing newspapers, daily and the local press, interviews and the personal field data. We collected 183 records for the period 2009 to 2016 and two records for the reintroduction period (2005 and 2006). We collected a total of 185 records of beaver presence. After filtering data, comparing them with found lodges, dams, holes in the ground, downed or peeled woody plants, we presented the final results in Table 2. Data are compiled from information about sightings of individuals or families (origin beavers and immigration beavers) and the mortality of individuals. Data is presented as a number of individuals per years (Table 2).

Table 2. Assessment of population growth of the beavers in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 2005 to 2016. / **Tabela 2**. Procjena rasta populacije dabra u Bosni i Hercegovini u periodu od 2005. do 2016. godine

Year	RNR	RNI	Mortality	Total
2005	20*	0		20
2006	40*	4	2	42
2007	38	2		40
2008	40	4		44
2009	38	14	3	49
2010	36	26	2	60
2011	45	13		58
2012	41	32		73
2013	41	47	1	87
2014	42	49		91
2015	45	67		112
2016	49	88		137

Note. * - supplemented information about reintroduction; RNR - Registered number from reintroduced individuals, RNI - Registered number of immigrated individuals, Total - Total of individuals / **Napomena**. * - dopunjeni podaci o reintrodukciji; RNR - Registrovan broj reintrodukovanih individua, RNI - Registrovan broj imigriranih individua, Total - Ukupan broj individua

4. DISCUSSIONS / DISKUSIJA

Beavers are widespread throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina, from mountainous regions to lowlands, mostly in the central part, then on the north, northwest and east. The results also suggest that beavers in Bosnia and Herzegovina occupy only watercourses of Black Sea basin.

If we consider the minimum number of individuals in the family to be two to a maximum of five individuals (which is in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the maximum number of registered individuals in the family), in Bosnia and Herzegovina would theoretically be 90 to 210 individuals. However, as the average observed number, in places where we registered families, was three individuals per family, the real number could be around 140 individuals, which coincides with the results in Table 2. Considering that in Bosnia and Herzegovina a total of 40 individuals were reintroduced in two years, the increase of the population by 2016 (for 10 years) is very slow, only by 100 individuals. In contrast, there were 85 individuals reintroduced in Croatia until 1998, which by the end of 2000 the increased 130 to 150 individuals, which is a noticeable increase (Grubešić, 2006). Our results suggest that if there was no immigration, primarily from Croatia and some from Serbia, population growth would be negligible. The reason for this low growth could be poaching. Such information is already known, but poaching is obviously much higher than expected. Also, another reason for this low growth could be limitations of territory where beavers were reintroduced. Beavers were able, from their home rivers Sokočnica (left tributary of Pliva) and Semešnica (left tributary of Vrbas), to expand its distribution area only to a few possible rivers: Pliva, Janj (right tributary of Pliva) and the upper course of the river Vrbas. Not far from the confluence of Pliva into the Vrbas (Jajce) starts the Vrbas canyon in which two hydroelectric power plants were built, and then just before Banja Luka (Bočac) once again Vrbas is entering the canyon with another hydroelectric power plant. Just the first obstacle, a narrow canyon of Vrbas with two hydroelectric power plants, represents an invincible obstacle for expansion of beavers. So, the results suggest that beavers have reached their peak in this area, in expansion of its range as well as in their abundance.

However, on the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, according to these data, it was found that the beavers spread, and that there is noticeable population growth (Figure 2).

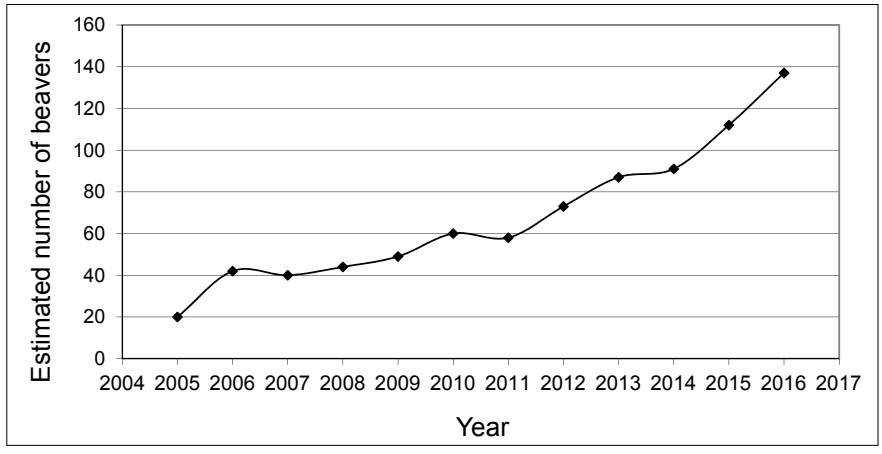

Figure 2. Beaver population growth in Bosnia and Herzegovina / **Slika 2**. Rast populacije dabra u Bosni i Hercegovini

The trend of population growth in the Eurasian beaver is also observed in Croatia, as well in most of Europe (Halley et al., 2012), so the migrations are not surprising. Eurasian beaver has the stats LC (Least Concern) on the IUCN list of threatened species which indicates that the population of beavers at European level in satisfactory condition (IUCN, 2008).

5. CONCLUSIONS / ZAKLJUČCI

Beavers are widespread in Bosnia and Herzegovina, but with a small population density. There mostly occupy central, east and northwestern, while on the northern part are rare. They do not exist in the south (Herzegovina).

There is an obvious growth in the population of beavers, from initial 40 individuals (2005–2006) to 137 individuals in 2016 (which is the largest number since the reintroduction). On the other hand, beavers on their "origin" rivers, Sokočnica, Semešnica, Pliva, Janj and upper stream of the river Vrbas, reached maximum expansion of their range and abundance (approximately 52 individuals).

The fact that 60.47% of registered families and 87.5% of registered individuals (singles) represent the immigration indicates the importance of migratory movements of this mammal (particularily from Croatia and Serbia).

It can be concluded that, given their small number in Bosnia and Herzegovina, their protection should be continued.

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Sažetak

Dabar je semiakvatični sisar koja nastanjuje prikladne vodotokove i vodene površine obrasle bogatom močvarnom vegetacijom drvenastih i zeljastih vrsta. Nekada je nastanjivao velike vodene površine od sjevera do juga evropskog kopna, ali početkom 20. vijeka opstalo je samo 6 autohtonih međusobno izolovanih populacija. Razlog koji je doveo do potpunog nestanka evroazijskog dabra u Bosni i Hercegovini je identičan je kao i u ostatku Evrope – prekomjeran izlov, a postoji više razloga za izloženost ove vrste konstantnom i visokom lovnom pritisku: vjerovanje u ljekovita svojstva pojedinih dijelova tijela (prvenstveno žlijezde *castor sacs*), korišćenje produkata žlijezde u kozmetičke svrhe (koristi se i dalje u proizvodnji parfema), kvalitet krzna, kao i dabrovo meso čiju je konzumaciju crkva dozvoljavala u vrijeme posta (karakteristično za područje Bosne i Hercegovine, Srbije, Hrvatske i Makedonije).

Zahvaljujući akcijama reintrodukcije dabra na nekadašnja staništa širom Evrope početkom 21. vijeka, dabar je ponovo prisutan na širem prostoru. Dabrovi su prvi put u Bosnu i Hercegovinu reintrodukovani 2005. i 2006. godine, čime je Bosna i Hercegovina postala 26 evropska zemlja u kojoj je izvršena reintrodukcija dabra sa ciljem ponovnog uspostavljanja njegovih populacija. Reintrodukcijom dabra na prostor Bosne i Hercegovine, on je postao zaštićena vrsta.

U periodu od 2009. do 2016. godine, prikupljeno je ukupno 964 podataka o prisustvu dabrova na području Bosne i Hercegovine. Trenutno na teritoriji Bosne i Hercegovine je registrovano minimalno 43 porodice i 8 individua (samaca). Kako su prosječno uočavane tri jedinke po porodici, na mjestima gdje su registrovane porodice, realna brojnost bi mogla biti oko 140 jedinki.

Ključne riječi: Bosna i Hercegovina, brojnost, evroazijski dabar, rasprostranjenost, rast populacije, reintrodukcija