

Castor fiber LINNAEUS, 1758



F. Müller

European beaver

AL	Kastori i Europes	LT	Upinis bebras
BG	Речен бобър	LU	Biber
CZ	Bobr evropský	LV	Bebrs
DE	Europäischer Biber	MK	Дабар
DK	Bæver	MT	Kastor
EE	Euroopa kobras	NL	Bever
ES	Castor europeo	NO	Bever
FI	Majava	PL	Bóbr europejski
FO	Bævur	PT	Castor
FR	Castor d'Eurasie	RO	Castorul
GR	Κάστορας	RU	Речной бобр
HR	Europski dabar	SE	Bäver
HU	Közönséges hód	SI	Evropski bobber
IR	-	SK	Bobor vodný
IS	Bjór; Bifur	TR	Avrupa kunduzu
IT	Castoro europeo	YU	Дабар

Distribution

European beavers once occurred throughout Europe and Asia, but habitat loss and over-hunting drastically reduced their range. By the early 20th century only five isolated sites remained in Europe; on the Rhône in France, the Elbe in Germany, southern Norway, areas of the Neman River and Dnepr Basin (Belarus) and Voronezh (Russia). Remnants also in Siberia and China. Since then beavers have been widely reintroduced, most recently to The Netherlands, Croatia and Hungary. They are now scattered across Europe and into western Siberia. Small populations in China and Mongolia. Mixed populations of *C. fiber* and *C. canadensis* occur on the Danube close to Vienna, but are not shown on the map as individuals have not recently been identified to the species level.

Geographic variation

There is no clear consensus regarding the number of subspecies, and many reintroduced populations were founded with beavers from a mixture of origins. Nonetheless, at least four subspecies are recognized in Europe: *C. fiber galliae* Geoffroy, 1803 from the Rhône; *C. fiber albicus* Matschie, 1907 from the Elbe; *C. fiber fiber* from Scandinavia; and *C. fiber vistulanus* Matschie, 1907 from Eastern Europe. Some *C. fiber vistulanus* have black rather than brown fur, but subspecies definitions are based mainly on cranial measurements. Three more subspecies in Asia.

Habitat

Lakes, swamps, streams, rivers and ditches where they have year-round access to water and woody vegetation. Although generally a woodland animal, they can live on farmland and even in quiet urban areas. Prefer lowland areas, but some introductions at approximately 500 m above sea level have persisted.

Population status

By the early 20th century the world population was only c. 1200 individuals but now there are almost half a million, of which 350000 in Europe. Recovery has been a result of continuing protection, reintroductions and translocations. Generally densest populations in countries with oldest reintroduced populations and large areas of suitable habitat (e.g., Latvia). Densities are roughly 0.2 colonies per km² in stable populations, but territory size varies with habitat quality.

International legal & conservation status

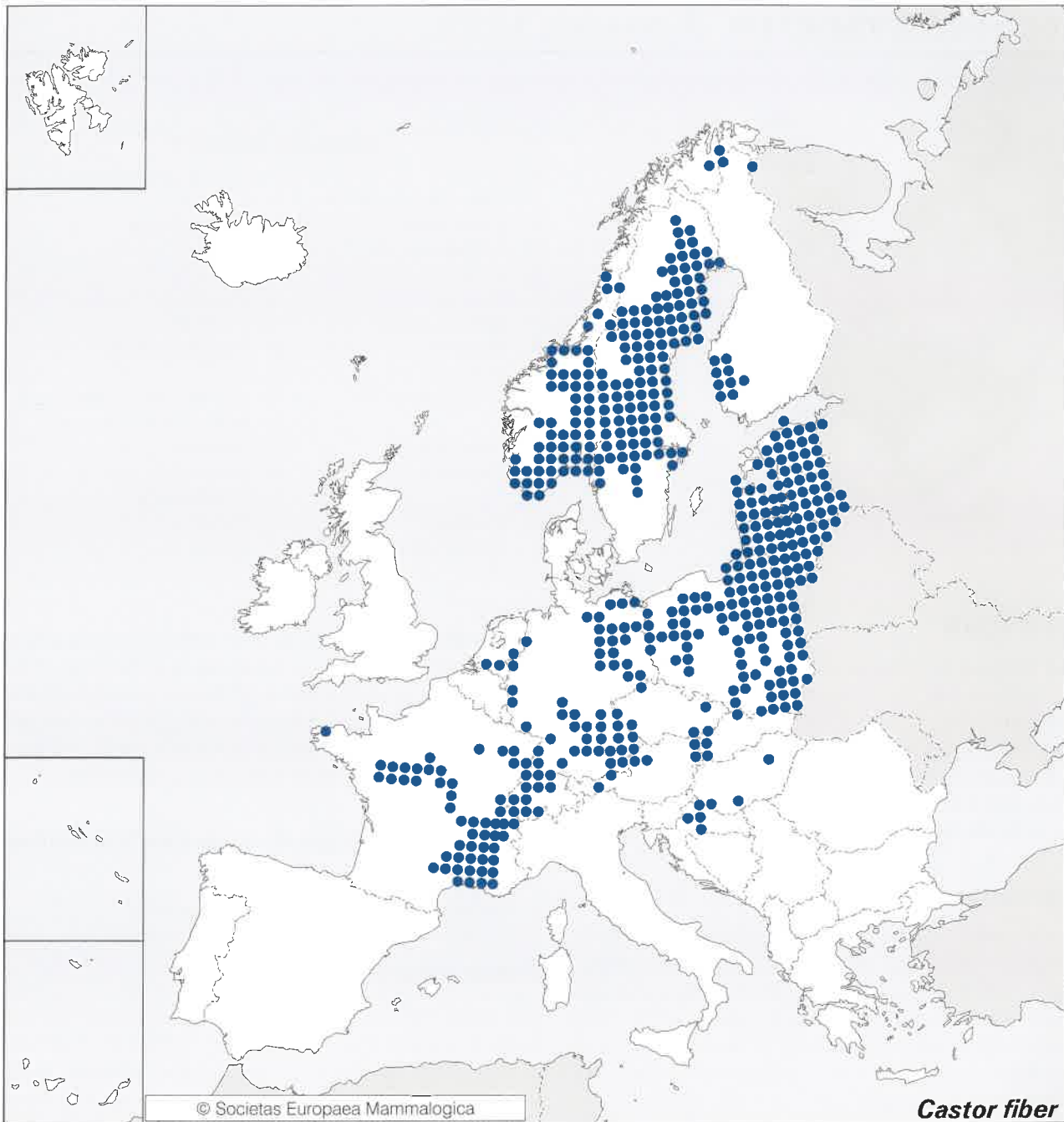
Bern Convention, Appendix III.

EU Habitats & Species Directive, Annex II & Annex IV (excluding Finnish and Swedish populations, which are on Annex V).

IUCN Red List, Lower Risk – near threatened.

Other information

Beavers have a major impact on their environment



through building of dams, burrows, lodges and canals, but the extent to which they construct these depends on local hydrology, geology, climate and food availability. Can damage crops, roads and trees through feeding and flooding, but in general should be considered a key-stone species in riparian habitats.

Among reintroduced populations, most mortality results from interference by man, particularly car accidents. In some countries beavers are treated as a game animal, with closed seasons and protection for dams. *C. fiber* and *C. canadensis* cannot interbreed, but the American species might outcompete the native European beaver in areas of overlap.

Literature

- Heidecke (1986)
- Macdonald *et al.* (1995)
- Nolet (1997)
- Nolet & Rosell (1998)

F. Tattersall