



RACCOON
RABIES

RABIES IS DEADLY.

Summary of raccoon
rabies surveillance
and control operations
in Québec in 2024



Rabies is a fatal disease that can affect all mammals, including humans.

Raccoon rabies surveillance and control operations aim to protect human and animal health by reducing the risk that this virus becomes established within wild animal populations in Québec.

SURVEILLANCE OPERATIONS

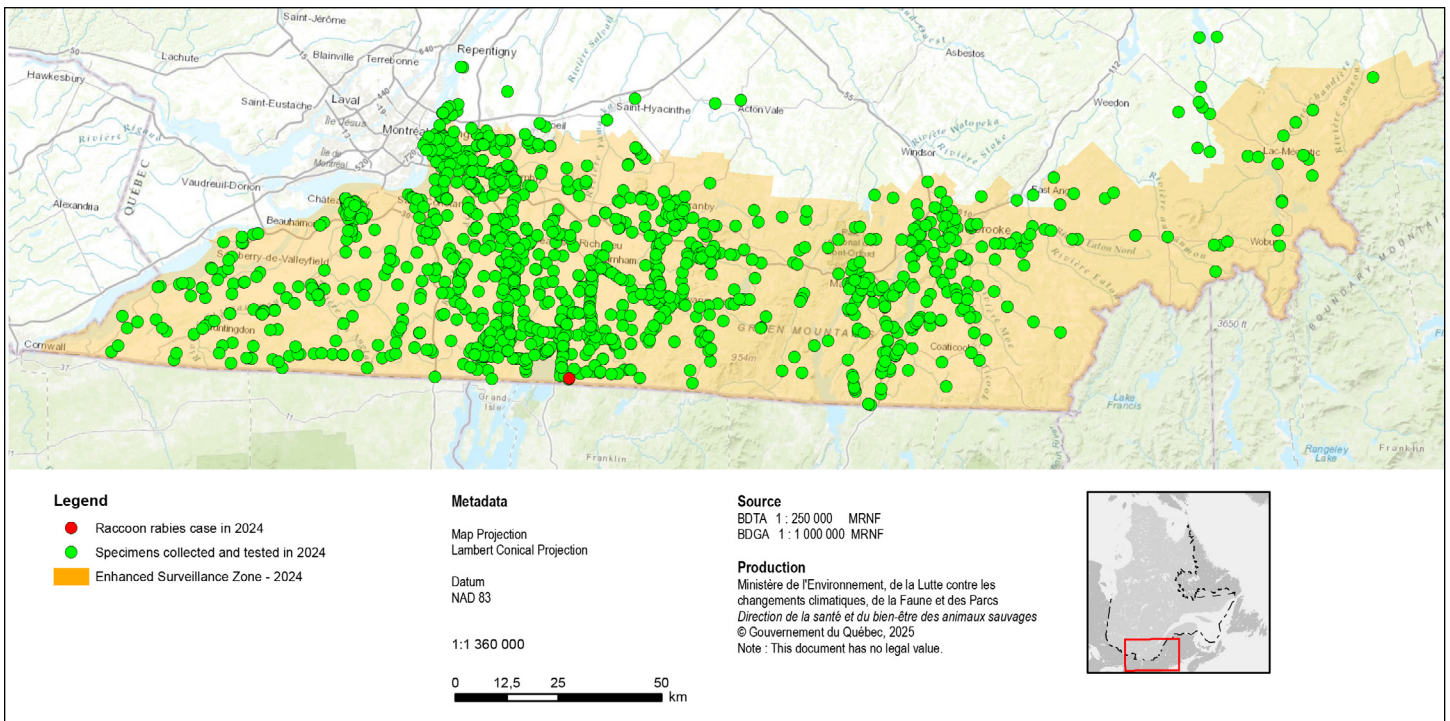
Enhanced raccoon rabies surveillance aims to quickly detect cases of raccoon rabies in wild animals in the regions considered at greatest risk of introduction, namely Montérégie and Estrie. Should raccoon rabies return to Québec, this surveillance makes it possible to monitor the progression of the disease across the territory and over time within wild animal populations. When the situation requires it, it thus helps provide essential data for deploying control operations.

Surveillance consists of collecting raccoons, skunks and foxes that are dead, injured, or showing signs of rabies, such as disorientation, abnormal aggression, loss of fear of humans or paralysis. These are the species at greatest risk of infection when raccoon rabies is present in an area.

At times, other species may also be recovered if they show signs consistent with rabies. These specimens are analyzed in a laboratory to determine whether they carry the disease.

In 2024, the enhanced surveillance zone covered the territory of 161 municipalities, Indigenous communities and unorganized territories in Estrie and Montérégie, over a surface area of approximately 14,200 km². The area covered by this surveillance is determined by taking into account raccoon rabies cases and surveillance efforts deployed in Québec and in neighbouring provinces and states.

The year 2024 stands out due to the increased risk of raccoon rabies returning to Québec from Vermont, in the United States. Between March and December, cases were confirmed in that state less than 40 kilometres from the Canada–U.S. border.



Map: Distribution of 1,351 specimens collected as part of raccoon rabies surveillance in Québec, from January 1 to December 31, 2024.

N.B.: At times, specimens reported outside the surveillance zone are recovered when they are of interest for raccoon rabies surveillance.

Surveillance activities carried out in 2024 led to the collection and analysis of 1,351 wild animals showing signs of rabies or found dead. Of these specimens, 736 came from the Montérégie region, 612 from the Estrie region and three from the Montréal region. This represents a 15% increase compared to 2023, when a total of 1,177 specimens had then been recovered. In general, the number of specimens collected each year varies between 700 and 1,200. The year 2024 was characterized by above-normal specimen collection. This increase is explained in particular by increased public communications, due to rabies cases detected in Vermont, near Québec.



A REPORT DOES NOT ALWAYS LEAD TO THE ANIMAL BEING RECOVERED.

Here are a few examples:

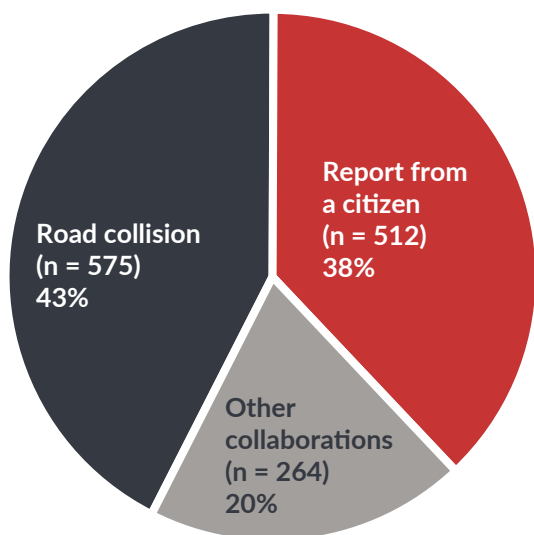
- The animal is no longer there at the time of collection;
- The animal is not in one of the targeted municipalities;
- The animal does not show signs consistent with rabies;
- The animal is not a targeted species;
- The animal is dead and in a state of decomposition that is too advanced for a laboratory test to be performed;
- The animal is simply a nuisance.



Photo: Blaise Carrier-Chouinard, MELCCFP

ANIMALS COLLECTED

Animals recovered as part of enhanced surveillance mainly come from two sources: reports from the public and wild animals that are victims of road collisions. Reports from the public remain the most effective way to identify potentially affected animals. When raccoon rabies is present in an area, it is common to observe animals with unusual behaviour, showing no fear of humans, and sometimes active in broad daylight, which contrasts with the habits of several species.



Source of the 1,351 specimens collected in 2024.

REPORTS RECEIVED FROM CITIZENS

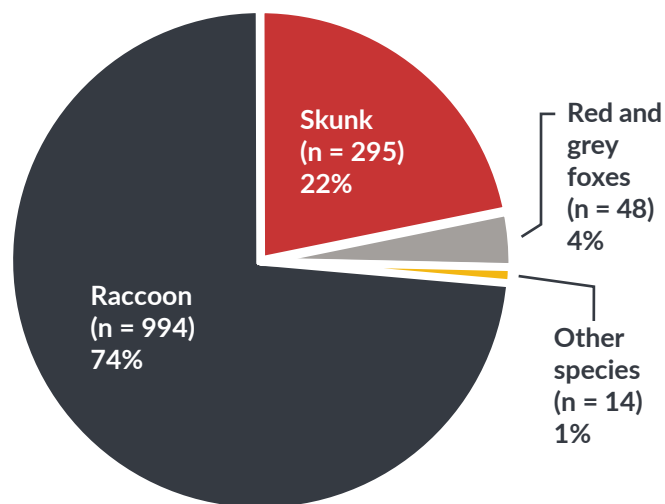
In 2024, 773 reports were received, a 5% increase compared to 2023. Typically, between 500 and 1,200 reports are processed each year. Of those received in 2024, 512 led to an animal of interest for surveillance being recovered, representing 66% of reports.

ANALYSIS RESULTS

Enhanced surveillance efforts in 2024 made it possible to detect one case of raccoon rabies in Québec. This is the first confirmed case in Québec since 2015. The animal, found dead of no apparent cause in the municipality of Saint-Armand, in Estrie, had been reported by a citizen and recovered on December 17, 2024. It was located less than 2 kilometres from the closest confirmed case, discovered two weeks earlier in Highgate, Vermont. Confirmation of the result was obtained on January 7, 2025 by the laboratory of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

The analysis results for all specimens collected in 2024 are as follows:

- One positive specimen;
- 1,198 negative specimens;
- 152 specimens with inconclusive results or not sampled (carcass too decomposed or crushed, or an unsuitable sample).



Distribution, by species, of the 1,351 specimens collected in 2024.

CONTROL OPERATIONS

The purpose of raccoon rabies control operations is to limit the risk of this disease being introduced into Québec. If an introduction occurs, these operations aim to slow the spread of the disease across the territory, with the eventual goal of eliminating it. Control essentially consists of deploying vaccination operations targeting the main species affected by the virus in a natural environment, namely raccoons, skunks and foxes.

In 2024, the raccoon rabies situation in Vermont became concerning, as it represented a significant threat of the disease returning to Québec territory. As a preventive measure, control operations were conducted in Québec between April and October 2024. No operation had been carried out from 2021 to 2023, since the threat of raccoon rabies being introduced from the United States had significantly weakened. Control operations were conducted from 2006 to 2020, which made it possible to eliminate raccoon rabies from Québec for the first time.

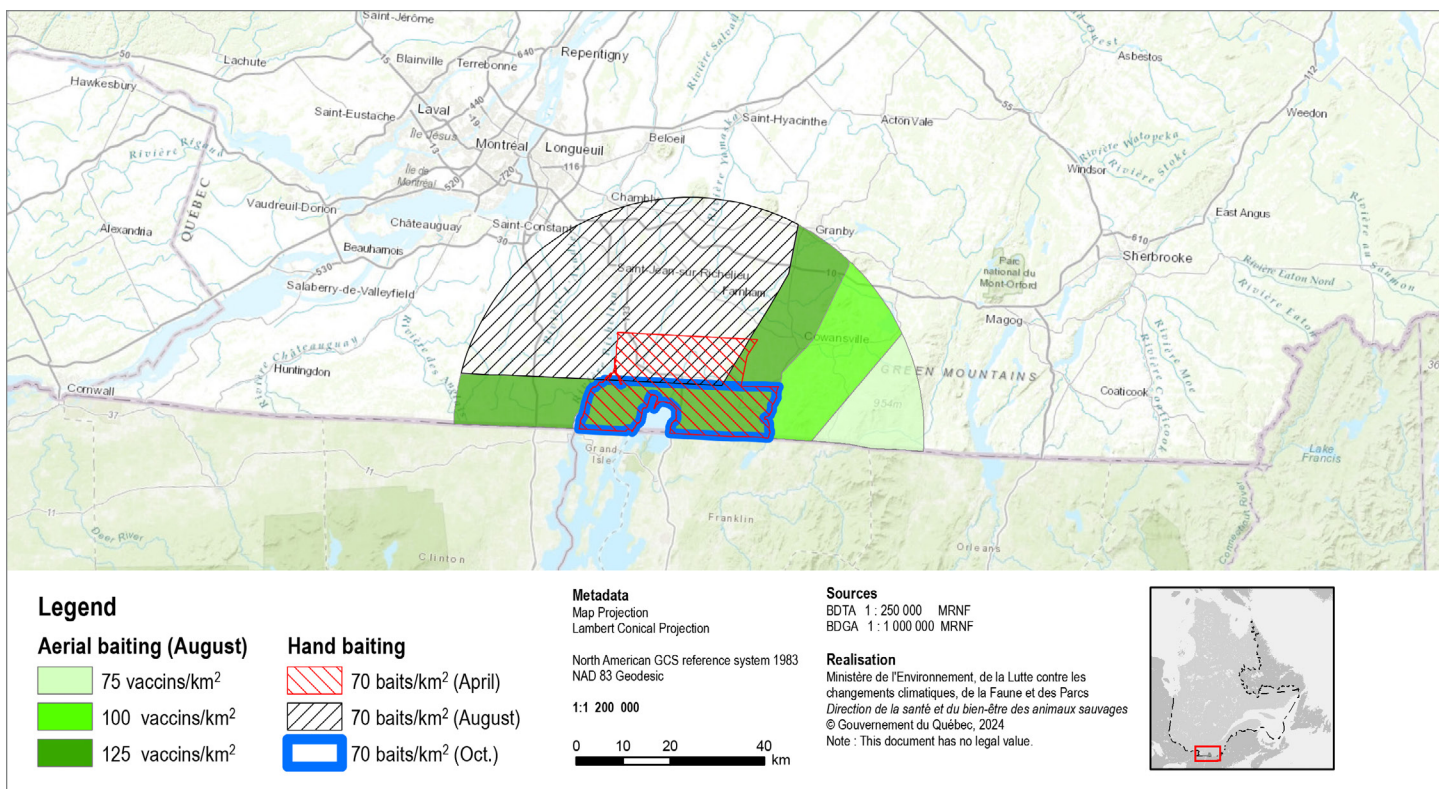
METHODS AND RESULTS

The control method used in 2024 consisted of distributing vaccine baits, using aircraft or ground teams. In total, 401,100 vaccine baits were distributed over a territory of 3,968 km², during three separate operations. The first operation was carried out in April through hand baiting, the second was carried out in August using a combination of aerial baiting and hand baiting, and the third was conducted in October through hand baiting.

Table: Summary of the three control operations carried out in Québec in 2024.

	Surface area covered (km ²)	Number of municipalities covered	Number of vaccine baits distributed
Operation 1, from April 22 to 25, 2024			
Hand baiting	664	17	46,200
Operation 2, from August 7 to 19, 2024			
Aerial baiting	1,934	32	183,750
Hand baiting	2,034	42	144,450
Operation 3, from October 28 to 30, 2024			
Hand baiting	380	12	26,700





Map: Raccoon rabies control operations carried out in 2024.

The vaccine baits used in Québec are developed and manufactured in Ontario. The bait consists of a capsule containing the vaccine liquid that makes it possible to immunize wild animals. What attracts the targeted species is the smell of the waxy substance covering the capsule. Since the vaccine bait does not contain an active rabies virus, it cannot transmit the disease. Animals that have consumed a vaccine bait develop immunity to rabies. This helps limit the progression of the disease within wild animal populations.

The discovery of a case of raccoon rabies in Québec in December 2024, despite the control operations conducted in 2024, is not evidence of failure. Several years of control operations are required to achieve a sufficiently high number of immunized animals to slow the spread of raccoon rabies and eliminate it from Québec territory. According to assessments carried out by a committee of experts, in the absence of control operations, rabies progression in Québec in 2024 would have been faster and the number of cases higher. The method of controlling raccoon rabies by vaccinating wild animals has proven effective in the past in Québec as well as in other Canadian provinces and U.S. states.