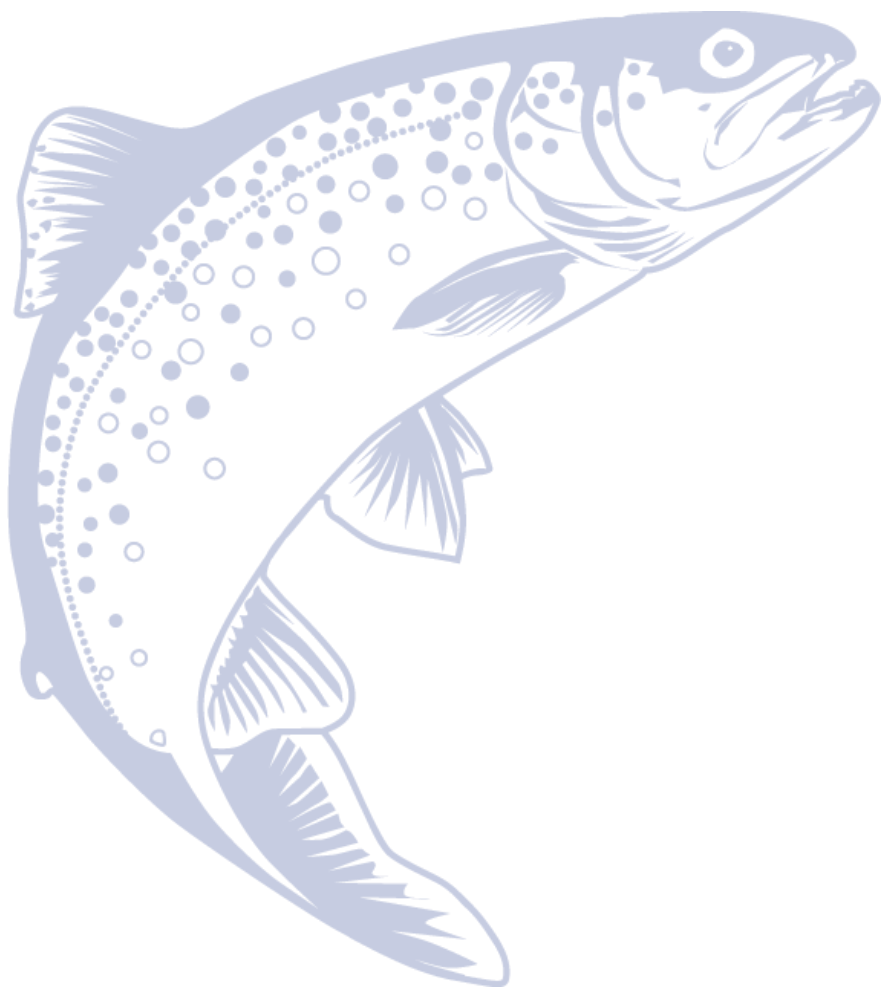




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EU law and local cormorant management: a critical assessment of reality

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The Cormorant

(Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis)

- The protection of the great cormorant in europe is an impressive success story
- Cormorants are one of the best studied bird species in the world
- They are impressive fish hunters with extraordinary abilities
- They are highly mobile and area expansive
- Since 1980's population has increased dramatically in whole europe
- As birds know no borders, local or national legislation is less efficient



Actual situation

- Cormorants are protected under the European Wild Birds Directive 2009/147/EC
- Directive allows Member States to make exceptions (so called “derogations”).
- Local use of derogations vary and are subject to change over time
- Responsibility belong to national and/or regional authorities



EU suggested cormorant management tools

- Scaring cormorants away from a fishery
- Protecting the fish – exclusion techniques
 - Local measures that help to directly protect the fish by preventing cormorants from reaching them (e.g. using nets and overhead wires).
- Reducing fish availability to cormorants –
 - fish stock management techniques.
 - habitat modification techniques
- Reducing cormorant numbers
- Financial compensation



Scaring cormorants away from a fishery

- Aversive conditioning is not effective
- Various studies have revealed that aversive conditioning can **occasionally and locally displace cormorants**.
- This does not lead to permanent absence or a reduction of resting cormorants. The root cause is the high mobility and migration behavior of cormorants. The available living-space due to aversive conditioning was instantly refilled by additional migrating birds.[1, 2, 3]

[1] Keller, T. IM. & Lanz, U., 2003, Kormoranmanagement in Bayern - Was können wir aus sieben Wintern mit intensivem Kormoranabschuss lernen? Vogelwelt 124, Suppl.: 339-348.

[2] Bregnballe, T., Hyldgaard, A.M., Clausen, K.K., Carss, D.M. , 2014, What does three years of hunting Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* tell us: shooting autumn-staging birds as a means of reducing numbers locally. Pest Management Science, 71, S. 173-179

[3] Chamberlain, D.E., Austin, G.E., Newson, A.J., Johnston, A., Burton, N.H.K., 2013, Licensed control does not reduce local Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* population size in winter. Journal Ornithol, 154, S. 739-750.



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Protecting the fish – exclusion techniques

- Netting or wiring is only feasible for small ponds (fish farms).
- Other birds are also caught in overhead wires / nets
- Bad press releases and legal dispute for fish farmers
- Disrupt the natural appearance of water bodies
- Many fish-farms are also Natura 2000 sites





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Reducing fish availability to cormorants

- Habitat restoration does not protect fish from cormorant predation.[1]

*„With this, in bodies or stretches of water, which are subjected to a considerable predation due to cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*), despite good water morphology and water quality, this can lead to a considerable deviation from the water type-specific natural fish community and thus to a too bad evaluation.“*

- fish stock management techniques
 - Threatened fish species can often not be stocked



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„Breed and shoot“

Est. 25.000 breeding
pairs in germany

Est. 25.000
cormorants are shot
every year in germany
(most in Bavaria)



Why let we breed out that massive population to
shoot them afterwards during bird migration?





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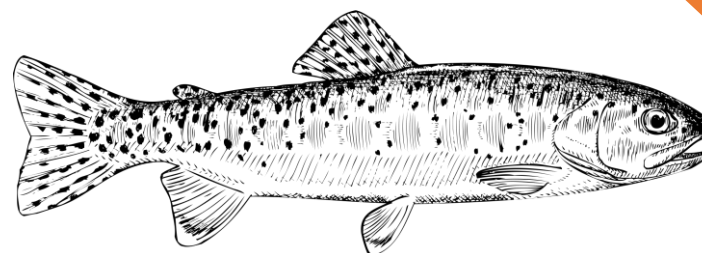


Cormorants are
protected by
EU Birds directive



European Wild Birds
Directive 2009/147/EC

Directive allows
Member States to
make exceptions



16 Federal
states

Member
State

Responsibility belongs
to federal states

“16 Kormoranverordnungen”

- Only outside of natura 2000 sites. Time and geographically limited.
- Subject to change after every election
- Constant legal fight with bird protection organizations



Observations

- Cormorants reached a 'favourable status' in the 1990s and therefore in 1997 removed from the Bird Directive's Annex I
- All member states of the EU have signed the **Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD)** 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.
- The conservation of biological diversity is a multilateral treaty to protect not only species itself, also the genetic diversity of the species.
- Overwhelming cormorant populations threaten the genetic diversity of endangered fish species (ex. Grayling *Thymallus thymallus*). █

It is a loss-loss situation ...

- Every year
 - More killed cormorants
 - More killed fish
 - More loss of biodiversity
 - More closed aquaculture-farms
- Lack of coordinated management measures
- Lack of understanding and collaboration between member states



Challenges

- Bird conservation organisations recently bought properties in germany with breeding colonies
- After cormorants leave their breeding colonies conflicts pop up throughout europe.
- Ex. Nordics, Germany, Lake Constanze, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia ...
- As a result cormorants got displaced many times and finaly often killed



Challenges

- Major parts of environmental and bird protection organizations also admit the need for cormorant management measures.
- Necessary cormorant measures are **almost entirely carried out by anglers, hunters and fishermen.**
- Fish farmers have to spend up to 30% of their work force for deterrent measures.
- Breeding locations are often disconnected from damage locations
 - Major negative impact for threatened fish is disconnected from breeding habitats. Missing awareness in breeding locations based on disconnected damage locations.
 - Bird migration of overwhelming population leads often to total-loss for endangered fish species in upper river parts.



Chances

- Cormorants have a highly mobil and area expansiv „european lifecycle“
- Local management has proven to be ineffective, costly and conflictual
- **It is a pan european problem and needs a holistic proactive european management approach**
- Actively manage cormorants based on a population model rather than „breed and shoot“ (ex. deer and natural forest protection)
- As the cormorant has reached favourable status long ago (at a time where the population was half the size of what it is today) it should be considered to reevaluate the protection status i.e. the transfer of cormorants to Annex IIa of the European Wild Birds Directive 2009/147/EC
- This would allow Member States to decide themselves if the cormorant should be managed as a huntable species in their countries.



Resolutions with no results

- European Parliament resolution of 4 December 2008 on the **adoption of a European Cormorant Management Plan** to minimise the increasing impact of cormorants on fish stocks, fishing and aquaculture (2008/2177(INI))
- Call on the Commission, together with the Member States, to take action to **drastically reduce cormorant stocks** using all methods so that, on the one hand, the survival of cormorant stocks is secured and, on the other hand, no threat to other species is created and damage to the aquacultures concerned is averted. *(European Parliament resolution of 12 June 2018 on towards a sustainable and competitive European aquaculture sector, P8_TA-PROV(2018)0248)*



Final notes

- Anglers, fishermen and fish-farmers respect cormorants
- Nobody has interest to shoot cormorants for it's own sake
- Nobody is questioning a sustainable cormorant population in europe
- We expect the same right for healthy wild fish stock and the protection of threatened fish species
- We need a fundamental change in the light of
 - Treatment of cormorants
 - preservation of biodiversity
 - workload of nessecary management measures



Thoughts ...

- Anglers, fishers and fish-farmers feel disenchantment with politics.
- It is a 30 year old conflict.
- What is the fundamental benefit of protecting an overwhelming population of a single bird species with a **favourable conservation status in the light of all the problems for other species?**
- Why let we breed out a massive population to shoot them afterwards during bird migration?
- In Slovenia sensible river systems are now guarded with retired volunteers from November till March. What is the future perspective for this desperate measures?

Foto: Silvio Heidler





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Thank you!

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