

Nordic Cormorant meeting 10-11 November 2020



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Ministers

Via Zoom

Memo Marina Nyqvist & Heli Saarikoski

DAY 1, 10.11.2020, NORDIC EXPERIENCES WITH CORMORANTS

19 participants

Marina welcomed everyone to the first joint cormorant meeting. The need for meetings between managing authorities was identified by cormorant researchers in previous project during 2017-2018. Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association then took the initiative to apply for funding for organising such meetings. The organisation of these meetings is financed by the Nordic Council of Ministers. The aim of the meeting is to start collaboration by exchanging knowledge/learning from each other, and to take the first steps towards a joint Nordic cormorant management. This is the first of three planned meetings. Nyqvist thanked all participants for investing their valuable time into the meetings. The interest to participating is an excellent starting point for reaching the aims.

Lasse Peltonen, the meeting facilitator

All participants presented themselves briefly. Attached a list of participants/organisation.

Thomas Bregnballe, researcher at University of Aarhus, presented an overview of the number of breeding cormorants in the countries around the Baltic Sea as part of an EU funded project in 2012. This is now 8 years ago, and there are plans to apply for funding for a new extensive count.

He showed most countries' cormorant development graphs. In Estonia, an apparent stabilization of the population in around the 2010, and then growing quickly, shows that you cannot interpret years stable numbers to mean that a cormorant population will stay like that forever.

Thomas also presented results on migration routes based on ring marking data (site of marking – site of recapture dead).

The results also show that Finnish cormorants seem to migrate faster. There has been a succession of the cormorant population from the west towards the east.

Niels Jepsen, researcher at the Technical university of Denmark presented a Danish timeline of cormorant management.

Counting of nest since 1975. During the first 20 years an exponential growth along the coast, causing problems in coastal fishing and fish. At that point there was a food limitation on the coast for cormorants causing them to spread more and more to fresh water. Today around 30 000 breeding pairs, max number of cormorants in the fall 250 000, min number in winter 15 000. Many updates of their management plan. The first plan from 1992, sixth plan now under way.

Caroline Vestergaards Mikkelsen gave information on the derogation measures and the development of the number of permits granted over the years in Denmark.

There will be a new management plan in Denmark 2021. They have an expert working group including researchers (Thomas and Niels) and national stake holder organisations. The group meets 2-3 time per year and are hosted by the Danish Environment Agency (Caroline V M).

On state land, the Nature Agency takes responsibility of regulation (egg oiling).

Number of permits has increased from 50 per year in 2014 to over 450 in 2019. Now the Angler associations also apply for permits.

In Denmark the application is done through a web-application form. The permitted regulations in different areas are based on the management plan. It takes up to five days to get a decision on the application.

Impact assessment of successful regulations have now been done through surveys to those that have received permits.

Ebba Henning-Planck, Sweden

Sweden has a management plan from 2014, which is a guideline for the county administrative boards, which take decisions on derogation measures on a regional level.

About 40 000 breeding pairs, and 14 000 wintering individuals.

According to Ebba, a larger scale count in the Baltic sea is much needed, we need to look at the problem from a larger perspective.

The cormorant-fishery conflict in Sweden is mainly along the coastline, but there are also major conflicts in a couple of the largest lakes.

Anybody can apply for permissions in Sweden, and the permits can be transferred to others. The application process has been criticised to be slow (can take up to 4 weeks?).

The web-form application system in DK is a good model, this would speed up the application process.

Bird life have taken a general stand of objecting all given permissions to the courts.

Salli Uljas, Finland

Yearly count of nests since first nesting in 1996. Finland has no national management plan for cormorants. Processing of applications for derogation measures is centralised to the ELY-centre of Southwest Finland since 2015 (excluding Åland Islands).

About 26 000 breeding pairs the last few years, no over wintering individuals.

Currently, there are 11 legally binding derogations to shoot cormorants or disturb nesting. About 5-10 derogations are applied per year.

Ministry of the Environment has over the years appointed working groups with broad representation to discuss preventing damage caused by cormorant. The latest group was active 2018, produced a report in 2019, followed by an updated guideline letter on processing of application for derogation measures to the ELY-centre.

Regional cormorant working groups have been set up.

The occurrence of white-tailed eagles has caused the cormorants to move their nesting more to the inner archipelago.

Leila Suvantola added a need to identify hotspots of conflicts.

Robin Juslin, Åland Islands

Åland is an autonomous part of Finland, and therefore has its own management system with their own cormorant management plan, that is reviewed once a year. Permission for cormorant hunting covers the whole area, and the permits are not personal.

No breeding cormorants, therefore, no conflict associated with breeding colonies.

2400 cormorants shot on Åland in 2020. Coordinated shoot, focus on roosting sites, not feeding sites. The meat of the cormorants is used for food.

Oddgeir Andersen, Norway

New hunting legislation will be effectuated from April 1st 2022 to 31st of March 2027. The current legislation applies from April 1st 2017 to March 31st 2022. Current legislation allows cormorant hunting in salt water locations from October 1st till November 30th (only young birds) and in freshwater locations from August 10th till December 23rd.

The new legislation is in preparation and hearing will be later this year.

Important not to increase out take of carbo. Lack of knowledge of mixing of carbo and sinensis. Agriculture applies for permissions; local authorities give permission. National Environmental authorities do not know how many permissions have been given.

New wildlife Act aims for a national register for keeping track of permissions.

Bounty hunting on cormorants is in theory allowed in Norway, but first needs permission. Not sure if this has been allowed yet.

Discussion on what Nordic countries can learn from each other

The Baltic sea countries are all managing the same population of cormorants. If the birds are driven away from one area, they relocate in some other area. There is a need for a Baltic level cormorant management strategy.

Differences between the Nordic countries: In Denmark cormorants stay year-round and seriously affect fish populations in rivers (no major professional coastal fishing anymore), in Finland cormorants are migratory birds which are scattered in a larger area; problems experienced in areas where large colonies (cf. presentation by Veneranta).

In the Åland Archipelago cormorants have become an appreciated bird species because of the opportunity to hunt them.

A lot of uncertainties involved: If you reduce the cormorant population by 30%, it is not certain that you will also experience a 30% decrease in fish consumption or conflict, as the remaining cormorants can find good feeding sites.

Developing web tools. For a good and sound management, better statistics on how derogations are used, and their effectiveness are needed. A uniform reporting system of derogations measures is important.

At what spatial scale level should management take place - a specific area, specific gear or aim to reduce numbers in an area to lower impact or conflict? Level of interventions were discussed, site specific to general level.

Learning from group derogation in geese was suggested, including cooperation on barnacle geese, perhaps use experiences from geese platform for cormorants. For pink footed geese, a combination of measures is used to bring overall numbers down. Goose damage can be seen, cormorants feed under water.

There is a need to learn between the Nordic countries, especially among administrators: how they deal with difficult situations related e.g. to derogation permits close to nature protection areas, and how they interpret and implement the EU bird directive in different kinds of situations. Do some countries have good practices to speed up the derogation permit process?

Also need to learn from the effectiveness of derogation measures.

Press release

We discussed the joint press release; this would be a neutral text mentioning the topics that have been discussed. This was ok by everyone. Marina will draft a pr for tomorrow.

DAY 2, 11.11.2020, BUILDING A KNOWLEDGE BASE AND NEXT STEPS

17-18 participants

Heli Saarikoski, Finnish Environment Institute

Presented results from a workshop between Finnish and Swedish researchers on seals and cormorants. A joint memo was agreed on.

NJ reacted negatively at that they had compared impact of predation of fish predators to impact by cormorant predation on fish stocks.

Maria Ovegård, SLU

Presented overview of Swedish studies on cormorants' impact on fish stocks/fisheries.

New study by Ulf Bergström (continuing from Hansson et al. 2017) where they had looked at SD 27-29 during 2017-2018 showed that cormorants consumed 92- 95 % of total outtake of fish (including fisheries, seals). Study not yet published.

Lari Veneranta, LUKE

Presented results from PIT-telemetry study in the Quark.

Oddgeir Andersen, NINA

New SEAPOP- programme focuses on marine birds, does not include freshwater birds.

Interesting to look at the parasites of cormorants as a joint project.

Niels Jepsen, DTU

Presented overview of important studies from Denmark, which have affected management decisions. Many results on smolt predation and grayling, cormorants have been shown to have a significant impact on these populations.

Jepsen mentioned a book from 2012 on wildlife, including results on social studies?

Discussion: knowledge gaps & priorities and the way forwards

DK: There is a real need to reduce numbers of cormorants overall now, there are too many birds. We need to look at what the permit users are saying. Denmark is the one who manages the cormorants the most.

Commission is important for a population level management to become possible. Nordic countries should discuss with the commission.

There are few management or preventive measures to manage the cormorant population.

Ebba: Managers need to know what is not agreed by researchers. Cormorant management is dependent on the law. Multi-disciplinary and legal research also very relevant.

Niels: Managers need a better toolbox – what can we do, what does it cost? Focus should be now on really solving the problem.

Caroline: For managers in DK the focus is now on the money, ministers may say to do more, but we need to find finances.

Magnus: Sinensis not much focus in Norway. Research needed on mitigation measures.

Salli: In Finland concern over whether measures during breeding season disturb other bird species.

Thomas: Transfer research into management, management tools, when/where do tools work. There would need to be a platform for managers and those seeking to apply for permits where they can find research articles, management tools and experiences, and we need facilitators that help anglers/fishermen/volunteers to get organized for coordinated measures.

Leila: Legislation is strongly science based, there is a narrow view on granting derogation measures.

Thomas: Differences between the Nordic countries in how the law is interpreted/used. Differences in how liberal nations are.

Leila: Giving derogation measures for cormorants does not give right to derogate other birds.

What commission says on Barnacle goose - they are flexible.

Thomas: In DK observation of negative effect of oiling cormorant eggs is on spoon bills. They also leave their nests during the oiling event, and gulls, who breed nearby have been observed to predate on the

spoon bill eggs. No negative impacts of oiling have been found on the breeding success of species in the Bird directive annex 1.

Ebba: In Sweden we have been very restrictive on granting oiling permissions, but recently oiling has been permitted in Stockholm region.

Next meeting

Ebba suggested we would go through case studies from different countries to discuss derogation measures, e.g. case studies of measures near fishing gear, in fishing areas, spawning areas.

Thomas: Discuss possibility of cross-border management plan.

Niels: Barnacle goose management plan as a model. Preparation before next meeting, each one gets a task for the meeting.

Cormorants – very viable population, we all agree on this and that we could have less.

Someone suggested appointing sub-groups, for example, on agreeing on research agenda for Nordic cormorant research.

Joint management – information gathering possible/realistic to make a platform.

DG Environment, intercafe report provides a toolbox.

We can also email everyone updates and suggestions.

It would be important for national authorities to have money allocated for future investment/involvement in Nordic management planning. All national authorities willing to ask for funding.

Finding money to build a platform was discussed. Platform should be proactive, communicative, how to evaluate it?

Adaptive management important.

Next meeting suggested to take place sooner rather than later, and not wait for covid-19 to allow a physical meeting, instead a virtual meeting in January to keep momentum going.

List of participants

Name

Organisation

Andersen Oddgeir

Norwegian Institute for Nature Research

Atula Roosa

Ministry of the Environment of Finland

Bregnballe Thomas

Aarhus University

Henning-Planck Ebba

Swedish Environmental Protection Agency

Irgens Magnus

Norwegian Environment Agency

Jepsen Niels

Technical University of Denmark

Juslin Robin

Åland Provincial Government

Louhisalmi Matleena

Centre for Economic development, Transport and the Environment (Finland)

Norrback Markus

Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association

Nyqvist Marina

Ostrobothnian Fisheries Association (organiser)

Ovegård Maria

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

Peltonen Lasse

Akordi, University of Eastern Finland

Risberg Per

Swedish Environmental Protection Agency

Saarikoski Heli

Finnish Environment Institute

Suvantola Leila

Ministry of the Environment of Finland

Uljas Salli

Centre for Economic development, Transport and the Environment (Finland)

Veneranta Lari

Natural Resource Institute Finland

Vestergaard Mikkelsen Caroline

Danish Nature Agency

Vikström Suvi

Finnish Environment Institute