



Cormorants & Legislation: *a licensing perspective*

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Vertebrate Wildlife Management

'to provide practical, legal & cost-effective solutions'

NATURAL
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Processed 16,500 applications in 25/26



European Protected Species



Badgers



Deer



**Invasive Non-
Natives**



Birds



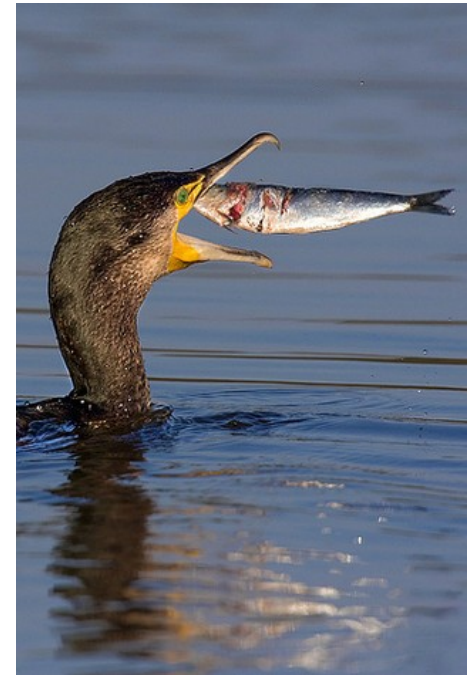
Cormorants – *UK species*

- Traditionally associated with rocky coasts & estuaries but now common on inland lakes & rivers
- Piscivores (fish-eating)
- **Two sub-species**
 - *Phalacrocorax carbo. carbo* (coastal breeder)
 - *Phalacrocorax carbo. sinensis* (inland breeder from
Continent)
- Introgression occurring



Cormorants – *diet & feeding behaviour*

- Extremely opportunistic –will travel far to exploit available food sources e.g. *roach & perch in Lough Neagh, N.I.*
- Forage range from roost sites is greater than that from breeding colonies
- Alternate between lakes and rivers depending on weather e.g. *freezing temps & flooding*
- **Diet** - extremely varied range of fish species & size taken
 - 80-90% of diet consists of 5-7 preferred species
 - fry to 500+mm (preferred size = 100-200mm)
- **350g – 500g fish daily** (but can consume up to 1/3 body wt i.e. 1kg)



Cormorants – *impacts on fisheries*

Direct

- Predation



- Physical damage



Indirect

- Behavioural changes
- Disease (*damage & stress*)

Impacts on fisheries & angling

- Viability of commercial fisheries & fish farms
- 3 to 4 million Anglers - *contribute c. £3+ billion to UK economy*
- Social & health benefits



Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981

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Offences (Sec 1)

- kill, injure or take any wild bird
- take, damage or destroy nest of any wild bird (while in use or being built)
- take or destroy eggs of any wild bird

Licensing

- Sec 16 of WCA 1981 confers Licensing powers on Natural England
- Licences can be issued for specific purposes
e.g. *preventing serious damage to crops, growing timber, **fisheries***



Licensing – *five principles*



1. Genuine problem to resolve or need to satisfy for which a licensing purpose is applicable
2. No satisfactory alternatives
3. Licensed action will contribute to resolving problem or meeting the need
4. Action to be licensed is proportionate to scale of problem or need
5. Licensed action will not have an adverse effect on favourable conservation status of any habitat type or species within its natural range

2004 review of licensing



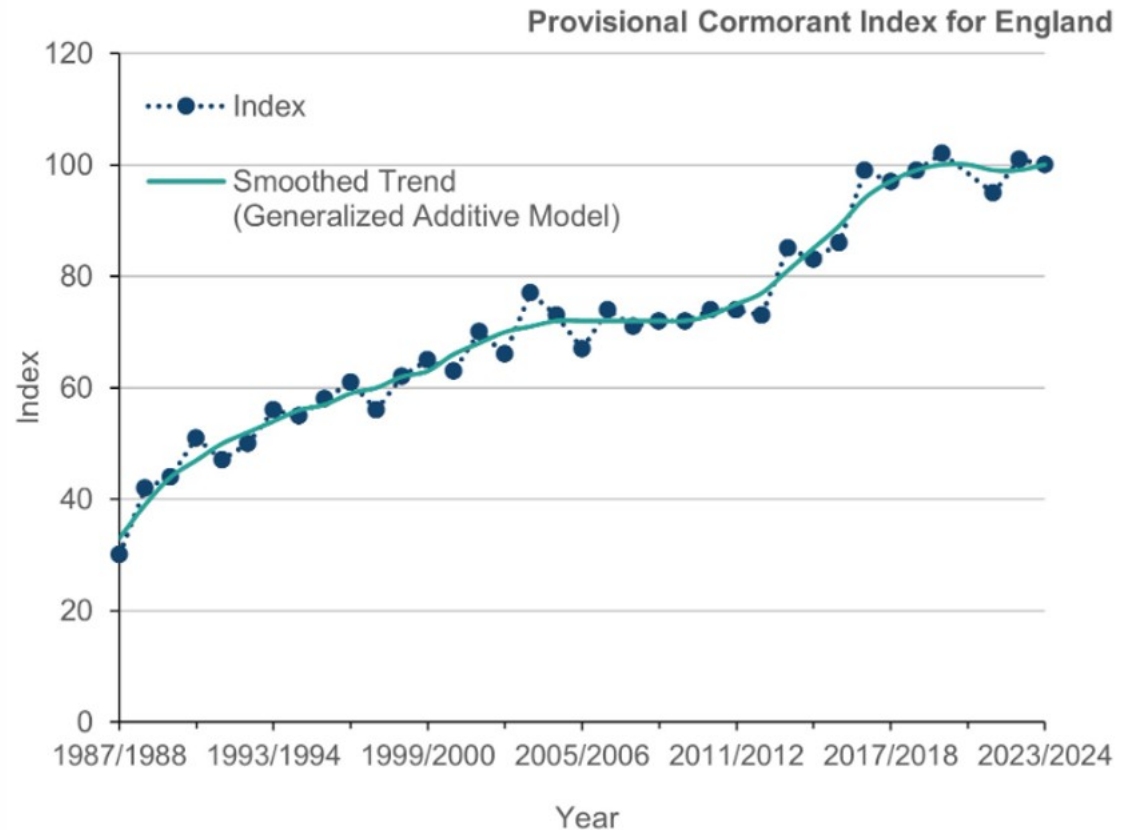
Policy revised with intention of making licensing system more accessible for those with a genuine need to obtain a licence:

- Lower threshold definition for serious damage =
 - *significant numbers of cormorants actively feeding at a site*
 - *site contains valued resource at risk of serious damage from cormorant predation*
- Increase in no. of birds permitted to be shot each yr from 500 to 2000 (based on Fera modelling).....*increased to c. 3000 in subsequent years*
- Lengthened licensing period (& issued for 2 years)
- Ability to remove persistent (lone) birds

Setting the upper limit



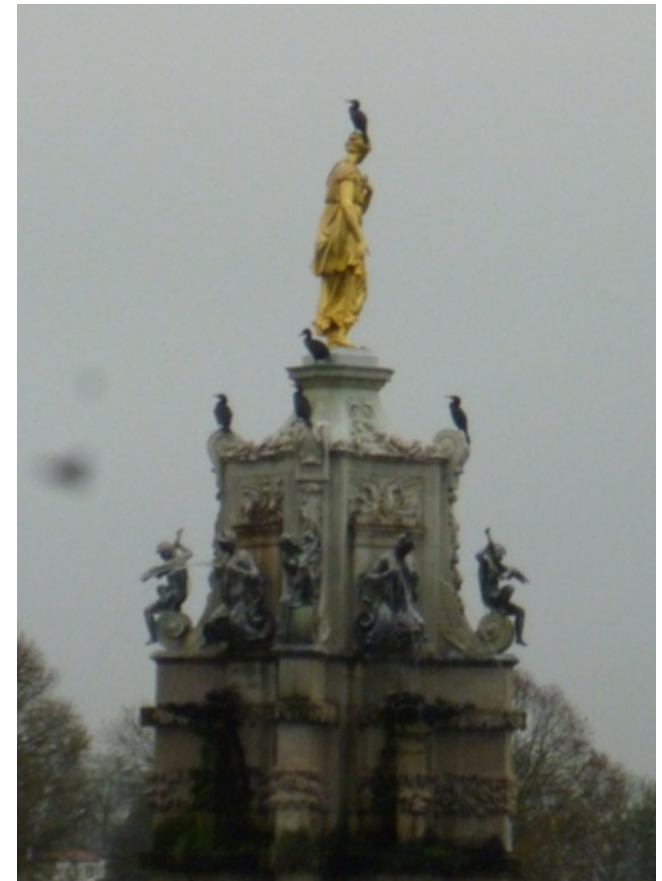
- National upper limit set to ensure that licensed removal does not irreversibly affect conservation status of species.
- Annual review based on:
 - Modelling
 - Population index
 - Nos of birds shot under licence



Source: JNCC Official statistic on provisional Cormorant population indices

Advantages of this approach

- Understanding of impacts
- Ability to respond to population changes
- Allows confidence in licensing a relatively high proportion of the population (around 10-15%) to manage damage



Obtaining a licence

Essential to satisfy three fundamental tests to justify granting of a licence:

1. **Serious damage** - *serious damage is being, or is likely to be, caused by cormorants at the site*
2. **No satisfactory alternatives** - *all other non-lethal anti-predation measures have either been tried and found to be ineffective or are impracticable at the site*
3. **Damage control** - *reasonable to consider that shooting cormorants will reduce, or prevent from increasing, the level of damage (whether through scaring or direct reduction of numbers)*



Evidence required



- **Bird numbers and behaviour:** *species, number, frequency & behaviour (for example feeding, roosting) of cormorants on the fishery. Detailed record of cormorant observations & behaviour over time (14 day) is key to demonstrating scale of problem*
- **Fishery details:** *type of fishery, fish species & size range (including stocking regime if relevant) and any info on status of species vulnerable to predation*
- **No satisfactory alternatives:** *log of non-lethal measures deployed (including type & frequency) at the fishery and bird reaction to these*

NB – can strengthen application with evidence of damage e.g.....catch returns, grading figures (fish farms), size classes, photos of damaged fish, membership renewals, costs of deterring birds, stocking

Licences



- Valid between 01 Sept & 15 April (or 15 May – salmon smolts)
- Strategic Habitats Regulations Assessment (SHRA) for Protected Areas
- Shoot to aid scaring (shotgun)
- Shoot to kill persistent (lone) birds (shotgun or rifle)
- Non-lethal scaring measures required
- Limited number of birds (min 3 / ave 5-6)
- Licensee plus 9 named persons
- Multi-year for low/medium risk situations
- Area-based (PALs)
- Renewals are streamlined



Licensing stats for 2025/2026



	<u>Total</u>	<u>PAL</u>	<u>Individual</u>
<u>Total Applications</u>	421	24	397
No. Granted	393	24	369
No. Withdrawn	19	0	19
No. Rejected	9	0	9
<u>New Applications</u>	44	2	42
<i>No. Granted</i>	33	2	31
<i>No. Withdrawn</i>	8	0	8
<i>No. Rejected</i>	3	0	3

