

## FOREWORD

Human beings often do not like any real or potential competitors. This feeling was the reason for the persecution of cormorants in Europe over centuries, resulting in extinction or near extinction in many areas. Next, reflecting new ideas of our relationship with nature, many species of animals were afforded legal protection in many countries, including the European cormorant. This may have saved the species from extinction and people were generally proud of this achievement in conservation. Indeed, I remember well the time in my country when cormorants, mute swans and European bison were flagships for nature protection.

But nature is very good at realising a potential for growth where new opportunities exist. Almost throughout the entire range of cormorants, populations began to rapidly increase and spread. This again created conflicts with Man because human beings do not like to have their livelihoods challenged by such successful competitors. But in the meantime our understanding of the organisation of nature and of our place in it had also changed. The cormorant was comprehensively protected by the law across Europe and, on the other hand, we did not believe that the pure fact that it feeds on fish was sufficient reason to implement severe measures against it. Actually we needed a better understanding of the ecological, economic and sociological aspects of the cormorant predation "problem" before any reasonable, largescale solutions could be taken. This is the reason that there is now such a large research effort orientated on cormorants.

The 3rd European conference on cormorants was held in Gdańsk in April

1993, organised by the Ornithological Station of the Institute of Ecology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Similar conferences had taken place in Sweden in 1985 and in The Netherlands in 1989. Each cormorant conference in the series had gathered more participants than the previous one. This time, almost 100 participants from 20 countries joined us in Gdańsk, and there were 70 contributions on different topics, either in the form of talks or posters. Almost the whole of this material is included in these proceedings. The conference culminated in the drafting of conclusions and recommendations in the form of the "Position Statement concerning Cormorant Research, Conservation and Management, Gdańsk 1993". The whole text of this statement is included in these proceedings also. During the conference the idea of formally establishing a new, international research group for cormorants was discussed. The Cormorant Specialist Group was thereby launched and was officially established in October 1993. It is now part of the "Waterbird Network" of Wetlands International (formerly IWRB) and of the Species Survival Commission of IUCN.

In many European countries, even just 30 years ago, cormorants were rare breeders with total numbers below 5000 pairs. Since the 1970s, the cormorant population has been increasing fast and, in the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century, numbers were estimated at almost 200 000 pairs. Feeding almost entirely on fish cormorants locally may cause substantial losses to human fisheries. In this situation cormorants have been the focus of much attention amongst

scientists, naturalists, fishermen, governmental and non-governmental organisations.

Some groups of people in Poland, but also in other countries, expected the Gdańsk conference to provide the solutions to many difficult questions. The conflicts between cormorants and Man needed to be solved, but the conference itself could not solve such problems. Knowledge about cormorants, particularly about their real role in the environment, is still far from adequate, for example with respect to the numbers of birds that may exist without detrimental effects on the human economy. But the problem is more complicated than just considerations of the growing numbers of cormorants and the vague, generally unreliable, details of their apparent competition with Man for fish stocks. For a real understanding of the processes involved, and for drawing final conclusions, much more high quality research is needed, as

well as goodwill from all sides to find solutions.

To all who have contributed to these proceedings I wish to extend my thanks and good wishes. I especially want to thank Jaga Gromadzka, my wife, and co-editor of this volume, for her hard work and dedication to the cause. Jeff Kirby and Robin Sellers kindly improved the English of the texts; and, particularly Jeff, who has contributed much effort and patience to this work. We are sorry that the preparation of the proceedings has taken quite a long time but, when you study the content of this volume, you will realise that it was not an easy job. We hope you find the end- result both useful and enjoyable.

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