11 Status of the breeding population of Great Cormorants in Greece in 2012

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To be cited as:

National summary

In 2012, Greece had 6,978 occupied nests of Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*) in 13 colonies. This is the highest breeding population of cormorants recorded in Greece since recording began. Breeding numbers increased by ca. 2,400 nests compared to 2006. For one colony we had to estimate breeding numbers from a count conducted in 2010. Besides this it is estimated that almost complete coverage of all known breeders was achieved in the 2012 count. It was not possible to count breeders in two small colonies (approx. 5-30 nests).

Distribution

Colonies were located in central and northern continental Greece distributed across five different regions (Fig. 11.1). The great majority of breeding cormorants (86%) were nesting in Central Macedonia (5,983 nests in four colonies). (Fig. 11.2). A further 12% of the nesting population (848 nests in five colonies) were located in Western Macedonia. The remaining 2% were distributed across three regions: Eastern Macedonia - Thrace (137 nests in two colonies), Western Greece (six nests in one colony) and Thessaly (four nests in one colony).

Around 90% of all the cormorants breeding in Greece were nesting in trees. The remaining 10% were nesting on the ground in two colonies on sand islets and two colonies were in reed beds. The majority of colonies (eight), including the largest ones, were located on inland lakes, artificial and natural, lakes (Fig. 11.1). Three colonies were situated in coastal areas and two along river floodplains.
Figure 11.1. Distribution and size of breeding colonies of Great Cormorants in Greece in 2012. Source: S. Kazantzidis, Forest Research Institute, Greece.

Figure 11.2. Regional distribution of the breeding population of Great Cormorants in Greece in 2012. Source: S. Kazantzidis, Forest Research Institute, Greece.
**Colony size**

In 2012, the cormorant population bred in 13 colonies – that is the highest number of active cormorant colonies recorded in Greece, to date. The largest colony housed 4,730 pairs (68% of the total breeding population in 2012) and was located in Central Macedonia (Kerkini Lake). Three colonies had more than 300 nests (302-784 nests) (Fig. 11.3) and 22% of the total breeding population was found in these three colonies (Fig. 11.4). Five colonies had fewer than 100 nests (4-59 nests), and these colonies housed only 1% of all breeders in Greece. The remaining four colonies of 101-300 nests held 9% of the breeding population.

![Colony size distribution graph](image)

**Figure 11.3** Size distribution of Great Cormorant colonies in Greece in 2012. Source: S. Kazantzidis, Forest Research Institute, Greece.

![Colony size distribution pie chart](image)

**Figure 11.4** Distribution (%) of the total breeding population of Great Cormorants in relation to colony size in Greece in 2012. Source: S. Kazantzidis, Forest Research Institute, Greece.

**Human intervention in colonies and other factors**

No management actions were carried out to control the numbers of nesting cormorants and there were no records of human interference in cormorant colonies in 2012 in Greece. However, occasionally, fishermen in certain sites (especially in lagoons at Thrace and western Greece) shoot cormorants when they approach fish wintering channels. These wintering channels, at Porto Lagos lagoon, in Thrace, are up to 2 km long and 40 m across and give shelter to up to 300 t of small fish (below market size) through the cold season. The number of birds shot is unknown since the shooting of cormorants is not legally permitted in Greece. One small colony in a recently restored lake (Karla Lake in Thessaly) failed in 2012 due to an increase in water levels which flooded all nests with their eggs or nestlings.

**Acknowledgements**

The organizer of the 2012 Great Cormorant count in Greece would like to acknowledge the participation of the following volunteers: Olga Alexandrou, Nikos Boukas, Stratis Bourdakis, Giorgos Catsadorakis, Yannis Fakriadis, Yannis Gasteratos, Panayotis Ioannidis, Stavros Kalpakis, Lila Karta, Lambros Katerinopoulos, Irene Koutseri, Eleni Makriyanni, Anastasia Michailidou, Dimitris Michalakis, Sotiris Mountzanos, Theodoros Naziridis, Harris Nikolaou, Panayotis Nitas, Vassiliki Orfanou, Maria Panayotopoulou,
Nikos Panayotopoulos, Kostas Papadopoulos, Pantelis Sidiropoulos, Christos Toskos, Rigas Tsiakiris.

The organizer of the 2012 Great Cormorant count in Greece would like to acknowledge the participation of the Hellenic Ornithological Society, the Society for the Protection of Prespa and the Society for the Protection of Nature of Kastoria for supporting the survey as well as the management authorities of the following National Parks: Evros Delta, Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, Kerkini Lake, Koronia and Volvi Lakes, Axios River Delta, Pamvotis Lake, Kalamas and Acherontas Estuaries, Strofilia and Kotychi lagoons and Karla Lake.

The Great Cormorant colony in the Axios Delta, June 2013. Note the presence of Pygmy Cormorants *Microcarbo pygmaeus* and a Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*. Photo: S. Kazantzidis.