23 Status of the Breeding Population of Great Cormorants in Switzerland in 2012

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To be cited as:

National summary
In the summer of 2012, Switzerland had 1,037 occupied nests of Great Cormorants (Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis) in 13 colonies. The overall number of nests has almost doubled since 2010 (560 nests). Cormorant numbers have been monitored in Switzerland since the establishment of a breeding population in 2001 (Keller et al. 2012). It is believed that complete coverage of all breeders was obtained in the 2012 colony count, which was carried out by volunteers under the guidance of the Swiss Ornithological Institute.

Distribution
Overall, 1,037 cormorant nests in 13 colonies were recorded in 2012. Most colonies were found in the lowland areas of the Swiss Plateau (Fig. 23.1). One colony was located in southern Switzerland in the low-lying valley of Ticino at the upper end of Lago (lake) Maggiore. Cormorants were found nesting at three new sites in 2012 (Les Grangettes on Lake Geneva, Lake Sempach and Mauensee, a small lake about three kilometres from Lake Sempach).

Most colonies are situated at lakes, with the largest ones found at the largest lakes, Lac (lake) Neuchâtel, Lago (lake) Maggiore, Zugsee and Lac (lake) Léman. All the large colonies are situated in areas with restricted access, six of which are in waterbird reserves of international or national importance. Most colonies are situated on islands or small peninsulas. Colonies on the shore are located in areas with limited public access. In the oldest colony, at the Fanel, cormorants nest on the ground on two artificial islands. In 2011, part of the colony moved to trees on the shore, and in 2012 about 40% of the nests were constructed in trees. In all the other colonies, nests are constructed in trees, most often poplar Populus sp., willow Salix sp. and alder Alnus sp.
Colony size

The two largest colonies, both situated on Lake Neuchâtel, held over 50% of the national population in 2012 (637 nests) (Fig. 23.2 and 23.3). Three more colonies contained over 50 nests and over a quarter of the national population (290 nests). All these colonies are situated on large lakes. There were eight small colonies containing 50 or fewer nests.

Human intervention in colonies

There was no human intervention in breeding colonies in 2012.
Acknowledgments

We thank the volunteer observers involved in the cormorant census in 2012: Michel Antoniazza, Jörg Hassler, Bernard Monnier, Paul Mosimann-Kampe,
Pascal Rapin, Roberto Lardelli, Daniel Kronauer, Hans-Rudolf Kälin, Jean-Claude Muriset, Patrick Franke, Edgar Grether, Thomas Troxler, Verena Keller, Brigitte Mäder, Martin Grüebler, Ruedi Wüst-Graf, Martin Wettstein, Alexandre de Titta, Isabelle Henry, Christa Glauser, Olivier Epars, Hans Schmid. We also thank the Federal Office for the Environment for the financial contribution to the coordination of the census.

References and further information
Keller, V., Antoniazza, M., Mosimann-Kampe, P. & Rapin, P. 2012: Dix ans de reproduction du Grand Cormoran Phalacrocorax carbo en Suisse (2001-2010). – Nos Oiseaux 59: 3–10. A pdf of the publication can be obtained by writing to Verena Keller verena.keller@vogelwarte.ch

Keller, V. & Müller, C. 2012: Breeding colonies of Great Cormorants Phalacrocorax carbo in Switzerland 2012. Swiss Ornithological Institute, Sempach. A pdf of the publication can be obtained by writing to Verena Keller verena.keller@vogelwarte.ch

Great Cormorant colony at Champ-Pittet on Lake Neuchâtel, Switzerland, April 2011. Photo: Verena Keller.