

INTERCAFE@Hanko Peninsula Meeting Summary

The seventh INTERCAFE meeting was held at the Tvärminne Zoological Station of the University of Helsinki (13-15 April 2007), which is situated on the Hanko Peninsula – the most south-westerly tip of Finland.

As well as the ‘regular’ INTERCAFE Work Group activities, the meeting was themed around the issue of “What to do when the cormorant comes”. This theme was chosen for two main reasons. First, unlike many countries covered by INTERCAFE, there are relatively low numbers of cormorants breeding in Finland (although numbers are increasing at around 50% per year). By summer 2007 there were an estimated 8,900 pairs in 29 colonies and population growth was strongest in the archipelago sea where numbers had doubled to almost 3200 pairs (with additional, unknown, numbers of ‘floating’ birds, non-breeders, and fledged young). Furthermore, cormorants have made a relatively recent appearance as a breeding bird in the country – so unlike many other European countries, they are a relatively new phenomenon. Second, despite the above observations, the Finnish government has already devised a National Cormorant Management Plan – it was published about 18 months prior to our meeting, in October 2005. Given INTERCAFE’s interest both in linking science and policy-making and in recording the feelings and thoughts of local people directly affected by cormorants, Hanko was seen as an ideal location to further explore these issues.

We were privileged to work with many local experts during the meeting. These included local land/water owners, fishermen and ornithologists, a representative of the local Fisheries Association, the Finnish Game and Fisheries Institute, and BirdLife Finland. In addition, a biologist from Tvärminne Zoological Station provided further ecological information, an ornithologist from St. Petersburg University in Russia offered us new data on the development of cormorant populations in the far eastern Gulf of Finland, and we learned about the archipelago’s changing economy and rural setting from a social scientist based at the Swedish School of Social Science at Helsinki University. We also heard first-hand from a member of the Working Group set up to develop the Finnish National Cormorant Management Plan. This collaboration and range of presentations on **Day 1** allowed us to learn much about the biological and social diversity of the area.

Once again, INTERCAFE participants found themselves exploring issues of scale. Cormorant colonisation of Finland began on a 2ha rocky skerry - set in the outer archipelago, itself emerging from the Baltic Sea. The Baltic covers some 415km², has an average depth of no more than 50m, and contains some 22,000km³ of water. This water - particularly near the seabed may take anywhere between 5-40 years to exchange completely due to the narrow constrictions to the west caused by Denmark and Sweden. Unlike, many traditional ‘oceanic’ seas, the Baltic is characterised by great differences in salinity (indeed, in some regions the water is essentially ‘fresh’) and hence, it holds a unique and highly diverse community of fishes. However, the enclosed and shallow Baltic Sea is highly vulnerable to environmental changes – be they caused by changes in the influx of saline water, changes in the quantity and quality (e.g. nutrient status) of freshwater runoff (from more than 200 rivers entering the Sea), and numerous subsequent changes to the ecosystem. Politically and socially too, the Baltic is a dynamic system. In a region containing some 50 million people

development has been largely frozen in many places for 50 years by The Cold War. Today the Baltic is now emerging as one of Europe's most dynamic areas. Here, there are major infrastructure projects, new trading links, and sweeping political change. Indeed, in many countries bordering the Baltic, these changes can, and have, happened very quickly.

All three Work Groups spent the rest of **Day 1** exploring the local situation with regional experts. **WG1** (Ecological databases and analyses) focussed on improving their understanding of the North east Baltic (i.e. Gulf of Finland) from the perspective of both the birds and the fish/wider environment. Topics of discussion included: (a) breeding and colonisation, (b) European flyways and other issues to do with migration, (c) over-wintering of cormorants and, (d) environmental issues and their potential impacts on fish communities. **WG2** (Management tools) used the time to discuss management issues with a local Fisheries Association representative. Some of the most important issues to emerge from a management perspective included: (a) the differentiation between 'hunting' cormorants and 'shooting' them, (b) whether protection from cormorant colonisation should be afforded to some of the islands and included in the national management plan, (c) compensation - who is entitled to it and how it can be quantified, and (d) the relationship between relevant authorities and local people. **WG3** (Linking science with policy and best practice) conducted a Q&A session with a local land/water owner and a representative from Birdlife Finland. Key issues discussed included: (a) impact of cormorant (and other fish-eating bird species) predation on fish stocks, (b) other environmental issues affecting the Baltic, (c) collection and interpretation of scientific data and, (d) the general feeling that the Governments needs to put more resources into collaboration, compensation and research. The idea that data collection should involve all interested parties was also supported.

The fieldtrip on **Day 2** involved a visit to the Hanko Bird Station HALIAS and a boat trip on the converted trawler 'Anna' to a cormorant colony and grey seal areas. We travelled with three local fishermen, one full-time and two part-time and other local stakeholders. Discussions between INTERCAFE participants and local experts continued on this trip and we learnt more about the cormorant, fisheries and environmental-related issues faced by this region.

On **Day 3** the Work Groups continued with their activities (see Project information for aims and objectives of INTERCAFE). **WG1** discussed efforts to organise the Water Systems Database of cormorant colonies in Europe and how best to use it. Other issues were also debated such as preparation and data collection for the fish part of the database, winter roost counts, other roost and colony counts and the cormorant manual. **WG2** continued with the gathering of up-to-date management tools across Europe with six presentations from INTERCAFE participants or invited experts on: (1) The Finnish Grey Seal Problem and the Management Plan, (2) The Cormorant Situation in Hungary – Legal Framework, Environmental Judgement and Conflicts, (3) Cormoshop – Acoustic Detering Technique (in France) using *Orca* (Killer Whale) sounds, (4) The Current Cormorant Situation in Sweden, (5) Cormorant Conflicts and Management in Wallonia (Southern Belgium), and (6) Fishery and Piscivorous Bird Interactions in the Danube Delta, Romania. **WG3** activities focussed primarily on the main sub-group outputs including (i) the 'Ruffe' guide (bibliography offering an impartial list of references with summaries in relation to conflict issues),

(ii) scientific input into management plans for conflict species - including an overview of stakeholder involvement, (iii) exploring the process of devising the African-Eurasian Plan, (iv) focussed review of human-wildlife conflict case studies where strategies for managing the conflicts were successful, (v) media analysis – initial exploration of media portrayal of cormorant issues, (vi) law, regulation and ethical issues, and (vii) linking science with policy. These sub-group outputs will feed into the three main overall outputs for WG3 which are currently identified as:

- ‘Ruffe’ Guide – addressing key issues (and relevant findings) that INTERCAFE has had to consider while addressing the issue of cormorant:fishery conflicts.
- A Good Practice Manual – detailing the *process* of preparing and writing management plans.
- Informing EU policy – detailing mechanisms used to link science with policy