

INTERCAFE@Bohinj (Slovenia) **Meeting Summary**

The meeting held at Bohinj, Slovenia (7th – 9th October 2006) was the sixth scientific meeting of INTERCAFE. As well as the regular group work, the meeting was themed around the issue of “angling and EU legislation”. This theme was chosen carefully for two main reasons. First, angling (both as a recreational sport and a source of tourist income) is very important to this region of Slovenia, and to the country as a whole. Second, this meeting followed closely on the Action’s first E-conference (“Exploring issue of pan-European cormorant management” 2-19 September 2006).

We were privileged to work with many local experts during the meeting (including representatives of several local Angling societies, the Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning, the Institute for Nature Protection of Slovenia and DOPPS-Birdlife Slovenia) and this collaboration allowed us to learn much about fish diversity, fisheries management and the economic value of recreational angling to this area. Many of the fish species in Slovenia are of high conservation status and their protection - and that of habitats – is taken very seriously. Coupled with this, the relatively recent arrival of cormorants (another protected species) has led to considerable discussion on the impacts of these birds on fish stocks – particularly in habitats considered by many to be ‘pristine’ in relation to many other European waters. Indeed the situation could be described as “*protected cormorants foraging on protected rivers feeding on protected fish*”.

Much of the debate and discussion surrounding cormorant-fisheries issues leads to the matter of EU legislation, its meaning, interpretation and practical application on the ground. On **Day 1**, as well as presentations given by local experts on the cormorant-fisheries situation in Slovenia, the participants also discussed European legal matters with (i) an International and European environmental lawyer who presented information on legal institutions and instruments in EC law and the regulatory framework of the Habitats and Wild Birds Directives and (ii) a representative from the EC’s Directorate General Environment who presented information on the cormorant in the context of the Birds Directive.

The presentations given by Slovenian experts included:

- (1) Slovenia: facts, figures and fishes
- (2) Problems of cormorants on the Sava Bohinjka river
- (3) Measures against fish-eating birds in the Soča River
- (4) Conflicts between cormorants and autochthonic fishes in the River Krka
- (5) Wild Birds and Habitats Directive – transposition and implementation on the example of the cormorant and fish species

All three WGs spent the rest of Day 1 exploring the local situation with the Slovenian experts. WG1 (Ecological databases and analyses) discussions considered that although many of the rivers and fish communities in Slovenia are deemed to be ‘pristine’, there are a number of exotic, non-native species. Discussion also explored the scale both of cormorant impact on local fishes and of the stocking regimes used as part of local fisheries management programmes. WG2 (Conflict management and resolution) focused on encouraging dialogue with local experts. Two perspectives were presented and explored – the anglers’ perspective and the National/Ministry

perspective. WG3 (Linking science with policy and best practice) included local and national experts from one of the local angling clubs, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning and DOPPS Birdlife Slovenia. They conducted a Q&A session to examine the local situation.

The fieldtrip on **Day 2** took us from Lake Bohinj, via Bled and Kranjska Gora, through the Triglav National Park. Much of our journey was along the Soča River and our guides provided a commentary about significant aspects of the places we passed, for example in terms of ecology, commerce, society and culture. These points helped significantly in setting a context for the fisheries-cormorant conflicts that were described. Along the way we stopped for a detailed presentation about Marble Trout and other aspects of angling. We visited a Marble trout and Grayling hatchery and a small institute where fishery scientists work.

On **Day 3** the work groups continued with their activities (see Project information for aims and objectives of INTERCAFE).

WG1 undertook five activities during the meeting, (1) E-conference discussion with a focus of identifying gaps in the biological data particularly, (i) How many cormorants are there and where are they? (ii) Recent changes in cormorant status and distribution, and (iii) population modelling-how do current models fit with real world data? (2) Cormorant manual, (3) Water systems database, (4) winter count 2003, (5) Breeding count 2006, (6) Organisation of the next winter count.

WG2 also discussed the E-conference examining specifically four themes – (i) why some people believe that a pan-European cormorant management plan is needed, (ii) what is meant by the term ‘pan-European management’?, (iii) can we learn lessons from Swiss management plan (control at specific sites to keep them cormorant free)?, (iv) How does the Birds Directive allow people to cope with a problem like the cormorant one?

Several presentations were also given by INTERCAFE participants and invited experts: (1) How to prepare cormorants for food, (2) EAA Cormorant questionnaire-main results from 14 countries, (3) Brief analysis of the cormorant situation in Latvia, (4) Cormorants in England and Wales-population & management, (5) Stakeholder views and engagement-the human side of conflict resolution in the UK, (6) WG2 expected outputs. In relation to the E-conference

WG3 discussions focussed around concepts of needs, fear and perceptions, examining specific issues such as tolerance (social carrying capacity), perceptions (e.g. issues of trust), cormorant management plans (How many birds is too many? What are the possible solutions?), serious damage (economic and non-economic) and how to measure other (non-cormorant) impacts on fish?

WG3 then focussed on its deliverables: (1) Bibliography. Subheadings include: (i) Where do overall common management plans exist? What conflict species are countries already dealing with? (ii) Tools for successful conflict management, (iii) Resolution of human-wildlife conflicts – what worked? What didn’t?, (iv) Wetland management for birds, (v) Relationship between science and policy, (vi) Communicating science, (vii) Law and regulation, (viii) Ethical perspectives.

Several groups have formed to investigate and analyse specific issues. The themes are: (2) Review of existing management plans of focal or flagship species/habitats in own countries, (3) Examination of how scientific knowledge was incorporated into the Action Plan for the Management of the Great Cormorant in the African-Eurasian

Region, (4) Review of literature or cases of human-wildlife conflicts that have had some degree of success because of co-operative solutions, (5) A review of media articles in relation to human-wildlife conflicts for further analysis