



January 15, 2020

## **GBA opposes the proposal to institute a Cormorant Hunt**

Comment on: Proposal to establish a hunting season for double-crested cormorants in Ontario  
ERO number: 013-4124; Comment ID: 16100; Updated: Nov 7, 2019.

Legislation to institute this cormorant hunt is now going ahead, apparently because there *“continues to be concerns expressed by some groups (commercial fishing industry, property owners) and individuals that cormorants have been detrimental to fish populations, island forest habitats, other species and aesthetics.”*

Addressing these concerns that cormorants have been detrimental to:

### **Fish Populations**

There is no scientific evidence or any study done that links cormorant numbers to declines in fish populations. There are however scientific papers that show that cormorants in the Great Lakes are almost exclusively eating round goby, five of which can be found on this page under the heading: *“Studies linking Cormorant diet to Round Goby”*. Furthermore, they are following the round goby into the inland lakes wherever there are water links, which is why their numbers have been increasing on some inland lakes.

Round goby have proliferated in the Great Lakes and connected water bodies and have a major impact on fish species such as lake trout, whitefish, perch, pickerel and pike because they are eating their eggs (laid in rock crevices to protect them from predation, but which the smaller round goby are able to reach). Therefore, the reason that cormorants are showing up at spawning beds for these species is that ***the round goby are there eating the eggs, and the cormorants are eating the round goby.***

All the above fish species also eat round goby as do bass, but cormorant have an important role in controlling round goby numbers. ***Reducing cormorant numbers will increase the impact on lake trout, whitefish, perch, pickerel and pike from round goby egg predation.***

### **Island forest habitats, other species and aesthetics**

It is correct that cormorant nests are messy, will destroy a few trees, and, in the process, disrupt habitat for some species, but the ***impact*** on island forest habitats and other species is ***very minimal*** and does not justify this proposed cormorant cull. On aesthetics, it would be similar to saying that beaver should be destroyed because they eat trees and their dams are messy, i.e. an ***invalid reason for instituting a hunt.***

## Other negative effects of a cormorant hunt

**Public safety.** *It is irresponsible to allow hunters to shoot from boats at a low flying bird* in a season that runs from March 15 to December 31, especially with a 50-bird limit that could result in many shots being fired. The potential for an accident when there will be recreational users also abroad on the Great Lakes, inland lakes and other waterways is too great a risk to take. **Children are particularly vulnerable**, being smaller and therefore less visible to armed fishermen or hunters in boats. Swimmers, kayakers, canoeists, sailors in small sailing boats, water skiers etc. will all be put at risk.

**Discarded carcasses.** Allowing hunters to leave behind the carcasses is also highly irresponsible. Quite apart from the negative aesthetics of rotting carcasses washing up onshore, cormorants are apex predators that accumulate biotoxins. **Any fish, animal or bird consuming the carcasses will be adversely affected if they consume too high a quantity.** In particular, readily available flesh of this nature will attract bald eagles who are known to favor cormorants for food. Cormorants with high levels of DDT are thought to have been responsible for wiping out the previous **Great Lakes bald eagle population**, which has only recently shown signs of recovery.

## Other considerations

Some studies have shown that **cormorants react to a reduction in their population by producing more chicks**, so it is possible that the proposed hunt will have no actual impact on cormorant numbers.

Two special pieces of new legislation are required to allow this hunt to proceed:

- Introducing **legislation to treat an inedible bird as a game bird** sets an irresponsible precedent and is disrespectful to a native species.
- Introducing **legislation to allow hunters to not have to collect the dead or wounded cormorants**, which will leave wounded birds to suffer, and the carcasses to rot, also sets an irresponsible precedent and is disrespectful.

We have also been informed that this proposed hunt is **contrary to the mission, conservation pledge and core values of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH)**, which can be found here:

<https://www.ofah.org/about-us/who-we-are/> On reviewing these responsible and important values, we can understand why a local Georgian Bay based OFAH association is strongly opposed to this proposed hunt.

## Recommendation

Georgian Bay Association recommends that the **appropriate action** to take, if there are legitimate concerns on the need to control cormorant populations, is to **conduct a study to determine the impact, if any, that cormorants have** on the native fishery. If this shows that culling is necessary in some locations, make recommendations on the **most viable and safe method of reducing the cormorant population**. In this context the past practise of oiling their eggs will likely prove to be more effective and will not result in the negative impacts, for the reasons given, and as set out, above. Furthermore, it would **eliminate the potential threat to public safety**.

## Links:

- GBA webpage with copies of 5 scientific studies that confirm current cormorant diet and impact of round goby on wild fish eggs: <https://georgianbay.ca/news/gba-opposes-proposal-to-allow-a-cormorant-hunt>
- ERO 013-4124: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/013-4124>