



**ANIMAL  
ALLIANCE**  
OF CANADA

*Animal  
Protection  
Through  
Education &  
Advocacy*



**Animal Protection  
Party of Canada**

## Fighting for cormorants: Briefing Notes

- For more than 14 years, environmental and animal protection groups including Animal Alliance of Canada, Animal Protection Party of Canada, Born Free USA, Zoocheck and Earthroots have been working to gain protection for cormorants in Ontario and across Canada.
- Double-crested Cormorants are native Ontario birds that have repopulated parts of their former range and fulfill a valuable ecological role. Not only do they benefit biodiversity but their presence signals healthy fish populations. They are an integral component of Ontario's natural heritage and a key component of island ecology.
- Persecution by humans and pesticide poisoning all but wiped out cormorants in Ontario on two previous occasions, the first through persecution and the second, continued persecution plus pesticides. Since being provincially protected from casual persecution and from DDT which was banned in the early 1970s, their population has rebounded. They are a key example of a successful recovery.
- Cormorants have been accused of water pollution, environmental destruction and decimation of fish populations. All of these claims are essentially false, at most reflecting value-driven biases.
- In November 2018, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry's proposed one of the most regressive wildlife "management" decisions in Canadian history under the title, "Proposal to establish a hunting season for double-crested cormorants in Ontario". The proposal included a bag limit of 50 birds per day with the hunt extending over 291 days. Some 197,000 small game permit holders would be eligible to hunt cormorants.

---

221 Broadview Ave.  
Suite 101, Toronto  
Ontario, Canada  
M4M 2G3

*Phone*  
416.462.9541

*Fax*  
416.462.9647

*E-mail*  
Contact@AnimalAlliance.ca  
*Website*  
www.AnimalAlliance.ca



The Government's proposal would:

- cause unimaginable cruelty by allowing the wholesale, uncontrolled, impossible to monitor, slaughter of cormorants across the province, including at a time when they have dependent young requiring food, water and protection;
  - devastate and very likely eradicate a recovered native wildlife species;
  - result in disturbance, destruction and death of numerous federally protected non-target nesting bird species such as Great Blue Herons, Great Egrets and White Pelicans, including nest abandonment and orphaned chicks;
  - irreparably damage natural ecosystems by the destruction of a keystone species;
  - encourage the worst form of "hunting"; and
  - endanger the public by allowing hunters to discharge firearms throughout the spring, summer and fall season when lakes and natural areas are populated by cottagers and tourists.
- The comment period ended on January 3, 2019. Opposition to the proposed hunt was wide-spread and included cottagers, hunters, conservation, environmental and animal protection groups, scientists, and MNRF staff from the north, southeast and southwest regions of the Ministry.
  - **In December 2019, Bill 138, Plan to Build Ontario Together Act, 2019 received Royal Assent. Schedule 13 of the Bill amended the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act to permit hunters to allow the cormorants they kill to spoil.** Section 13 did not address the other legislative amendments necessary to allow the hunt to move forward.
  - Animal Alliance of Canada requested all documents concerning the cormorant issue from January 4, 2019 to January 2020 through an FOI request, but have yet to receive the documents.

### **Cormorant Population Numbers:**

- US Great Lake surveys, conducted between 2005 and 2016 showed a 36% decline in the population (F. Cuthbert and L. Wires, Unpublished Data, USFWS)
- The last Canadian Great Lakes cormorant survey was done in 2009, 10 years prior to the proposed cormorant hunt.
- In 2019, the Ministry conducted aerial surveys of cormorant populations, but no data have been publicly released. AAC has filed an FOI request for the data but not received the information to date.

## **Ontario government has no data to support claims of depleted fish stocks**

- Cormorants are a natural part of Ontario's rich biodiversity and an ecologically beneficial species, being major predators of invasive fish species like round gobies and alewives, attracting other waterbirds to their nesting sites, and serving other important functions in the ecosystems they inhabit. In an interview on a recent Nature of Things show titled *Accidental Wilderness: The Leslie Street Spit* (<https://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/episodes/accidental-wilderness-the-leslie-street-spit>), Professor Gail Fraser, Associate Professor at York University noted that the stomach contents of the cormorants she has been studying at the Spit were predominantly alewives, a non-native fish.
- An eighteen-year review to the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for Lake Erie Yellow Perch and Walleye, discredits the claims that cormorants are depleting fish stocks. The TAC for Yellow Perch in Lake Erie increased continuously between 2000 and 2006 (when cormorant populations were peaking) and remained at an average of 15.6 million pounds.
- Despite hosting the largest population of cormorants in North America, recreational fishing is alive and well at Tommy Thompson Park. The species of fish caught at TTP includes Northern Pike, Largemouth Bass, Yellow Perch, Black Crappie, Freshwater Drum, Brown Bullhead, and Lake Trout.

## **Ontario government is putting cormorants at risk of extinction in Ontario**

- Cormorants occupy only about 3% of island sites in the Great Lake but because they are conspicuous, nesting on exposed islands and peninsulas, they are particularly vulnerable, being easily targeted and killed in their nesting sites. Small congregations could be wiped out in just a few hours, while larger colonies could be destroyed in just a few days or a week. Decades of conservation effort to recover the species will have been for nothing.

## **Ontario is putting other colonial waterbirds at risk:**

- Other colonial waterbirds including Great Blue Herons (GBH), Black-crowned Night Herons (BCNH), Great Egrets (GE) and others preferentially nest with cormorants. Cormorants in flight or on the water can easily be mistaken for loons, putting that species at risk. The Neotropic and Great Cormorants, both seen only rarely in Ontario and of great interest to the birding community are nearly identical to Double-crested Cormorants and could be killed for that reason.

- Colonial waterbirds nest in close proximity to each other, increasing the risk of injury and death of non-target birds. In addition, nest abandonment for both cormorants and non-target birds is also a very real possibility causing suffering and death of the chicks and additional mortality beyond that caused by hunting.

**Cormorants and other migratory birds including hawks and owls are protected under the US Migratory Bird Treaty Act (USMBTA):**

- The Migratory Bird Treaty or Convention is an [environmental treaty](#) between [Canada](#) and the [United States](#). It was originally signed on 16 August 1916 by the U.S. and the [United Kingdom](#) (representing Canada), entered into force in on 6 December 1916, and has since been amended several times.
- Various species of cormorants, including Brandt's, Double-crested, Great, Little Pied (*not native but in trade and in zoos*), Neotropic, Pelagic and Red-faced are all protected under the US Migratory Bird Treaty Act (<https://www.fws.gov/birds/management/managed-species/migratory-bird-treaty-act-protected-species.php>).

***Canada's Migratory Bird Convention Act:***

The Government of Canada's web site describes the Convention as follows:

*This Convention is an international agreement signed by the United States and Canada to protect migratory birds. In 1916, when the convention was signed, it only protected migratory birds considered either useful or harmless to humans; many species of migratory birds were excluded due to their "undesirability" to humans [at a time when knowledge of ecological interactions as yet to be understood]. The convention was signed to ensure the protection of migratory birds, their eggs, and their nests as many common species were in large decline or declared extinct, such as the Passenger Pigeon.*

*The Convention was introduced in Canadian law as the Migratory Birds Convention Act. Migratory birds are the full responsibility of the federal government, under Environment Climate Change Canada.*