



Subject: The January 2013 count of wintering cormorants in the Western Palearctic

Lelystad, November 2012

Dear National Coordinator,

This letter describes the second step of our project to count Great Cormorants in the Western Palearctic. The success of the coming winter count in January 2013 will again depend on your invaluable support and help as our National Coordinator and to a very great extent on the national network of volunteer field workers. We would like to acknowledge from the outset that your cooperation and contribution in the organisation and guidance of your counting teams is highly appreciated!

This letter deals with details relevant for the Great Cormorant Roost Count 2013:

- A. When and where to count
- B. Guidance of Counters
- C. The Counters' report of count results
- D. Access, rights and responsibilities using the CormoCount homepage
- E. How National Coordinators can report results to the count project
- F. Presentations of results

A. When and where to count

The prime date to make the count will be the **weekend** of the **12-13 January**. Additionally and as an alternative option (e.g. in case of severe weather conditions) the roost count can be carried out during the following weekdays or postponed to the next weekend (19-20 January) latest.

We try to keep the "time slot" for the simultaneous Pan-European roost counts as narrow as possible. We also hope for fairly stable weather conditions in the middle of January so that cormorants will not start moving and disperse over larger distances within our given count period.

The aim is to count the number of cormorants on all **night roosts** in all participating countries. Ideally, counts should take place **at the end of the day - about two hours before dusk or at dawn**. To avoid double counts, cormorants should not be counted during daytime on their feeding grounds or on their day roosts. Cormorants are highly mobile birds used to fly over longer distances (> 40km) between night roosts and feeding grounds. So it is necessary to organise and carry out coordinated, simultaneous **night-roost counts**.

If you think that there will be difficulties to collect night roost data on some sites in your country please contact your Area Coordinator as soon as possible to discuss the further procedure.

B. Guidance of Counters

It is important that all counters are well informed about:

- How they should count cormorants on night roosts
- What information they should register and report
- In what ways they can report their count results
- The deadline for reporting.

The communication of this basic information to the counters is, of course, most relevant and most urgent in the countries that do not already have a network of field workers counting cormorants at night roosts.

How to count. You will find the relevant guidance in our “Manual to Count Night Roosts” which will soon become available as a download. We recommend that you translate the most important parts of this manual. If other countries use the same language as you, then please inform your Area Coordinator that a translation of the text might be available for further use.

What to register and report. Many counters prefer to take a printed form with them in the field so they can fill in the required information on the spot. It might therefore be a good idea to provide the counters with such a form (see point C).

Minimum information needed. The following basic information from every roost-site count is required: date of count, hour of count, roost (site) name, geographical coordinates, type of count, total number of cormorants counted (at the end of observation time), best estimate of total numbers present at complete darkness.

As the National Coordinator you are also expected to describe how well different parts of the country were covered, and give your best estimate of the total number of cormorants present in the country at the time of the count.

How to report. If you do not have a system already then please inform the Counters about how you prefer that they report their results. (see point C).

Deadline. You decide as the National Coordinator when you would like the Counters to report. However, since the Counts Project would like to receive your report before 1 May 2013 we recommend that you ask your Counters to send results to you as soon as possible. However, we know that especially large countries will need extra time to complete the data collection. Please keep contact and inform your Area Coordinator about when you think it will be possible to send the results of the roost count.

C. The Counters’ report of count results

It is up to you as National Coordinator to decide and to offer the range of options that Counters can use for reporting results.

If you are already using a system to collect data records in a similar way in your country, please feel free to take advantage of your already established system.

Use of a standard form. We have designed a standard form in pdf as a guideline for the data collection. These forms will be made available as downloads and also be sent to National Coordinators directly. If your field workers prefer to use paper sheets please use these

standard forms and please take care and help your Counters in case translation into your own language is needed.

Use of the CormoCount home page. We have extended the design of the CormoCount homepage so that it offers a facility where Counters and National Coordinators can denote the location of the counted roosts/sites by use of Google Maps and can directly enter counts. We recommend that you take a look at the homepage: <http://cormocount.eu>

As National Coordinator you can pre-enter the name and location of known roosts if this might be an advantage from your point of view as a National Coordinator. We can also do this for you if you have a list with names and coordinates of roosts. There is a facility by which you as National Coordinator can allow the Counter to easily adjust the location of one of your predefined roosts.

You can choose to use this project homepage also only as a tool to enter final compiled data for your country yourself (e.g. when you are doing the data quality check in close cooperation with your team of fieldworkers).

D. Access, rights and responsibilities using the CormoCount homepage

The rights that a registered user has to view, enter, edit and export data from the data collection on a national level depends on whether he or she is registered as a Counter or a Coordinator.

As National Coordinator it is your decision and under your control which persons will get permission to use the homepage as a Counter or a Coordinator Assistant. To become a Counter the person will send a request through the homepage directly to you.

A new Counter starts out with the rights to see only the location (and coordinates) of the roosts defined by him- or herself. As the National Coordinator you can decide to upgrade a Counter whereby he or she gets permission to see the location (and coordinates) of **all** already defined roosts. An upgraded Counter is also allowed to submit suggestions for adjusting the location of a roost and add information to a roost. A Counter will not be able to assess and export roost information and count data entered by other Counters. As a National Coordinator you are able to access, edit and export **all roost and count data** from your country.

At a European level, the Cormorant Research Group is responsible for maintaining the count database and the decisions about use of data by third parties, including the EC. The general policy in this respect is not to publish or list any roost specific data at the level of coordinates.

E. How National Coordinators can report results to the Counts Project

Please contact and inform your Area Coordinator via e-mail when you are ready to report the final results from the count in your country. You can submit the results by:

- using the CormoCount homepage or
- submitting the final results using the project's forms or
- submitting the final result by any other lists that cover the minimum of information needed.

Please see the count manual descriptions for further details about what should be included when reporting results.

F. Presentations of results

We strongly recommend that the National Coordinators go through a quality check of their data as soon as possible and publish the major results (accompanied by relevant explanations) at the national or provincial level, e.g. in reports, articles or through homepages.

The Counts Project intends to present an overview of the major results from the January 2013 count of wintering cormorants in the following ways:

1. Presentation on the EU Cormorant Platform. The Counts Project team will present a summary of the overall results from the wintering count on the Platform in the form of text supplemented by a table (giving best estimates of numbers wintering in each country) and a map showing one circle per 50x50 km square to illustrate overall distribution. We will also compare numbers and distribution in January 2013 with numbers and distribution in January 2003.

2. Presentation in a WI/CRG publication. At present the Counts Project team has planned to give a final presentation of the major results from the January 2013 winter count in the proceedings from the next WI/CRG meeting, presently planned to take place in the spring of 2014. At present there is no plan for publishing a full report presenting country by country details from the January 2013 count.

If you have any further questions, please contact your Area Coordinator.

At the end of this necessarily long letter, we would like to end by saying that we fully recognise that organising a count of night roosts of cormorants is not an easy task, especially in countries that do not have an existing network of Counters. We are also conscious of the challenges that await all the National Coordinators in this major task.

We warmly thank you in advance for your commitment to the project and will, of course, be happy to help in any way we can if you need to discuss matters with us further.

Sincerely yours,

Mennobart van Eerden
Chair of Cormorant Research Group

Thomas Bregnballe
CorMan project co-leader

& Rosemarie Parz-Gollner, Stefano Volponi, Loïc Marion, Jean-Yves Paquet & Dave Carss

On behalf of the joint count project between IUCN/Wetlands International Cormorant Research Group (WI/CRG) and the EC initiative *CorMan*