

Cormorants: It's a European problem

By Martin Read

I THOUGHT that my article about cormorants in the January edition of Angling Star would give rise to some flak, at least from the many people I know who are RSPB members but, that has not been the case.

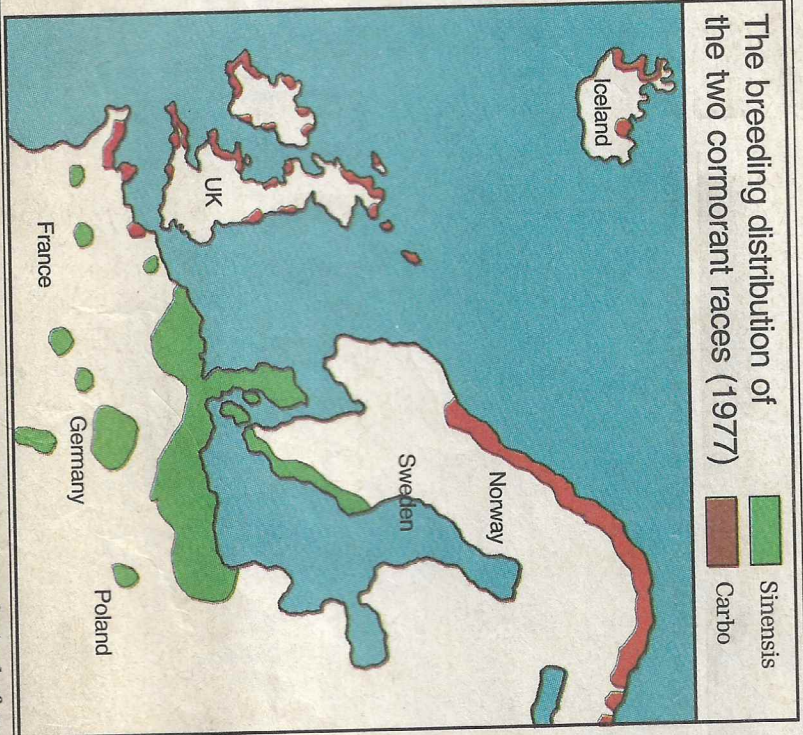
With the exception of Stuart Hurst's remarks ('World Apart' last month), I have received nothing but praise, often from anglers I don't know or have never met. One angler took the time to ring me early in the morning on the day the paper was published, before I had seen a copy, to thank me for enlightening him on a subject he knew little of. Another, who only fishes odd days in the summer, stopped me in the street, asked if I had written the piece, and was again complimentary. The story has been the same, be it match, pleasure or specimen anglers, and even a non-angler, a big surprise.

This may all sound bighheaded on my part, but it's not, I repeat what happened simply because there is obviously a deep sense of concern among anglers about cormorants, their effects on fisheries and the way in which the authorities are treating the problem. As might be expected, however, I have yet to receive an answer from the politicians.

Somehow, for angling's sake, all this reaction must be channelled usefully, a point that I will come back to later.

First, however, I would like to comment on some of the points made by Stuart, who concluded that I had got it

The breeding distribution of the two cormorant races (1977)



Act of 1981. This Act, in itself, implements a 1979 European Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. And this European Act, in turn, gives special protection to the European race of cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*), which was thought to be an endangered species in the Seventies. I apologise if this may sound a bit heavy, but the dates are vital, so please

gardeners in numbers, instead of sparrows and the like, but that's a different story).

So, back to the numbers. In the Netherlands the European species increased in number by 10 per cent from 1978 to 1992, in Denmark it was 24 per cent and in Germany 30 per cent. In Sweden, the number of breeding pairs rose from less than 1,000 to more

have to seek the approval of MAF to do so. If I did not get their approval I would certainly face a stiff penalty, if not imprisonment, and an angler catching it would be legally bound to kill it! Indeed, it is illegal to introduce any non-native species into the UK without permission. And rightly so, for whatever the example, grey squirrels, zander, crayfish, etc., etc., the outcome is usually to the detriment of our own flora or fauna. In the case of European cormorants, the detriment is to our native fish stocks. And this, I believe, is the whole crux of our argument. Cormorants of any kind are not naturally found on freshwater in the UK, in the numbers we see today. That is a fact. Furthermore, European cormorants which are not natural to the UK, but favour a freshwater diet and lifestyle, are resulting in untold damage to fish stocks, and should, following the principle of not allowing non-native species into the UK, be removed (and, if you don't believe the damage debate, it can easily be calculated that since the publication of the original article, one month ago, that the estimated 15,000 inland cormorant population in the UK has consumed the best part of one million pounds of fish). In brief, the UK's waterways and all that need them, including we anglers, are having to suffer from action taken by mainland Europe to protect a species which shouldn't live here anyway!

As a result of these recent findings, and again in order to channel the frustration which is obviously apparent, I am asking the Angling Star, as the leading angling publication in the North of England, to conduct a petition, through the pages of the paper, whereby ordinary anglers can do their bit and collect signatures, and which can be presented to the Government, asking for the European cormorant to