

RSPB Defends Cormorants

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has sparked outrage among anglers after claiming that cormorants aren't damaging fish stocks. In a letter to David Kidney MP, who had corresponded with the Society following concerns about RSPB policies from anglers in his Stafford constituency, the Society sought to decry anglers' fears about cormorant predation.

The letter also stated:

- There is no biological reason for the current licensing system
- Research assessing cormorant numbers is flawed
- The public would turn against angling if more birds were culled

TV legend John Wilson, condemned the claims outright. John claims that cormorants eat 46 million fish each year.

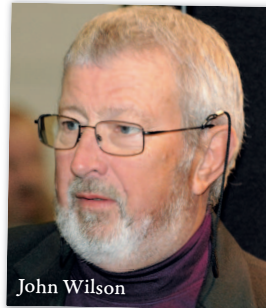
"The Society is a law unto itself. How can it claim the opposite of what anglers can see happening in front of their eyes? We know what damage cormorants do, we always have, but your average twitcher hasn't got a clue about what's really happening in the countryside. The problem with this country is that all wildlife is ridiculously protected, all except fish. Why is it that a beautiful 30lb carp that has grown from a fingerling for 25 years is worth less than a two-year-old otter or a

cormorant? It's insane," he added.

According to the RSPB's own figures there are currently 9,000 pairs of nesting cormorants in the UK and each bird eats 1lb 8oz of fish every day, numbers which John argues translate into an unsustainable amount of coarse fish.

But the Society says that while it has had to accept the current licensing system where fisheries can apply for permission to shoot a limited number of the birds each year, it is currently researching other non-lethal methods of deterring them and protecting fish stocks.

"While we've had to accept the limited controls, we definitely remain opposed to any kind of wider cull, and believe most anglers would be too. As for John Wilson's argument, it's unrealistic. These are sea birds and they eat sea fish and salmonids as well as coarse fish. If they were eating the numbers of roach John claims, then there simply wouldn't be any left anywhere," claimed an RSPB spokesperson.



John Wilson