

## 20 Status of the breeding population of Great Cormorants in Latvia in 2012

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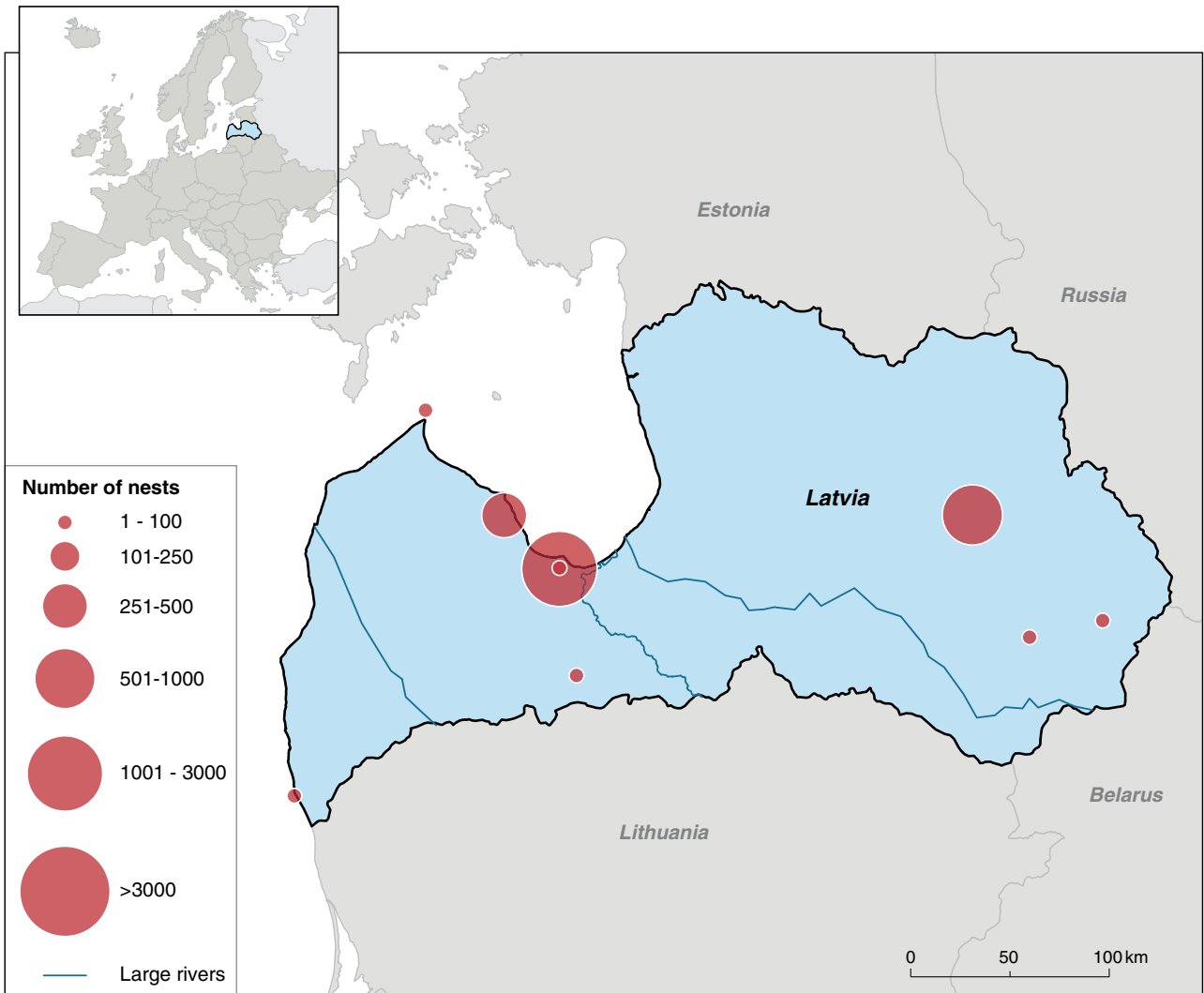
### National summary

In 2012, Latvia had an estimated 3,106 breeding pairs of Great Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax carbo sinensis*) in nine colonies. A total of 2,634 nests were counted, with the total coverage of all breeders estimated at 80 %. This is an increase of approximately 600 pairs compared to 2011. It is possible that some unknown colonies exist, especially in the eastern and south-eastern parts of the country. These areas contain a large number of water bodies and are rarely visited by ornithologists. Additionally, very little Great Cormorant research has been carried out in Latvia before 2009. During research in 2012 some potential breeding areas were visited, but no signs of breeding were found. Further research will continue in the 2013 breeding season.

### Distribution

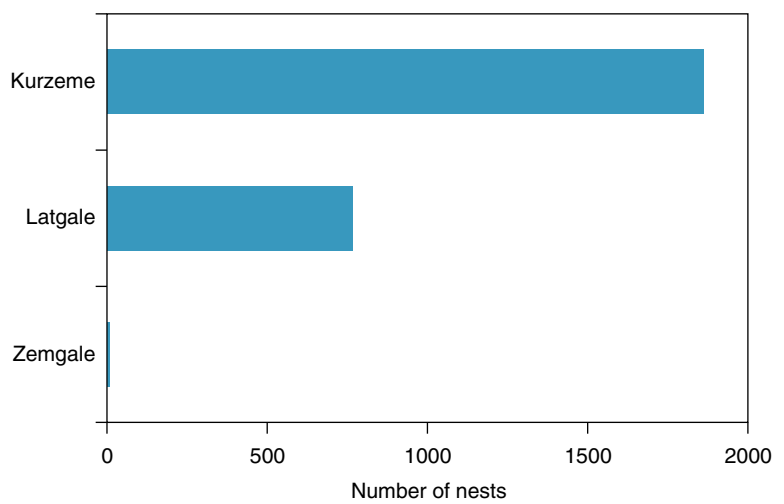
The breeding colonies were found across the country, at both inland and coastal sites. The largest colony was located on an island in a coastal lake named Kanieris, 6 km from the south-western coast of the Riga Gulf (Fig. 20.1). The majority of Great Cormorants (71 %, 1,861 nests) were breeding in the Kurzeme region located in western Latvia, bordering the Baltic Sea (Fig. 20.2). The Latgale region in the east, which borders Belarus and Russia, contained 29 % of breeders (765 nests), while a small number (8 nests, 0.3 %) were found in the central Zemgale region. One colony (Lubans Lake) was located on the border between two regions (Vidzeme and Latgale), but was assigned to the Latgale region for ease of analysis and presentation.

In Latvia in 2012, Great Cormorants built their nests both on the ground and in trees. 11 % were found nesting on the ground on small islets at Engure Lake, while the remaining breeders nested in the trees. There were two sea colonies in the Kurzeme region; one located at Pape (an old shipwreck) and one on the islet where the Kolka lighthouse is situated (located approximately 5 km from the coast).



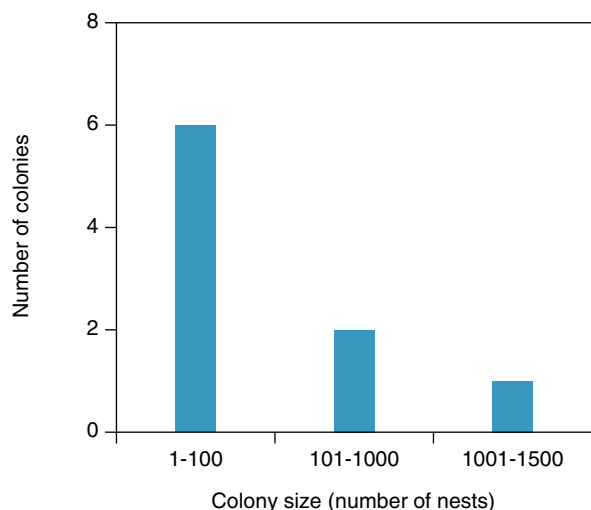
**Figure 20.1.** Distribution and size of breeding colonies of Great Cormorants in Latvia, 2012.

**Figure 20.2.** Regional distribution of the breeding population of Great Cormorants in Latvia in 2012.

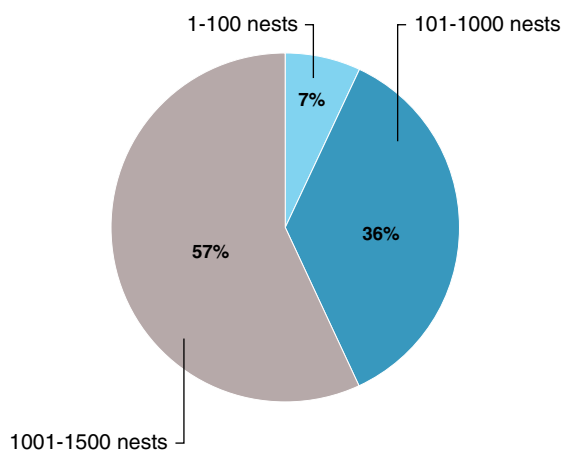


## Colony size

Only three colonies in Latvia had more than 100 nests in 2012 (Fig. 20.3). The majority of the breeding population (93 %) was found in these three colonies located at lakes Kanieris, Lubans and Engure (Fig. 20.4). The remaining colonies contained less than 100 nests, and these colonies had 7 % of all breeders in Latvia. The nests in Engure Lake colony were counted by ornithologists from the Laboratory of Ornithology (Institute of Biology, University of Latvia) and later by the author.



**Figure 20.3.** Size distribution of Great Cormorant colonies in Latvia in 2012.



**Figure 20.4.** Distribution of the Great Cormorant breeding population in relation to colony size in Latvia in 2012.



The author with a fledged young at Lubans Lake, Latvia, July 2012. Photo: Karlis Millers.

## Human intervention in colonies

Management is now carried out in two areas in Latvia where conflicts with fisheries are intense. The Nagli fish pond fishery has requested annual permits from the authorities (Nature Conservation Agency) to shoot approximately 50-70 Great Cormorants for the last four years (possibly longer), with the number of permits (relating to the number of birds allowed to be shot) varying from year to year. Permission was granted in 2012. The shooting takes place after the waterfowl breeding season (July) in the fish ponds territory, which is a complex containing more than 27 ponds of different sizes located approximately 13 km southwest of the Lubans Lake colony. The main aim of the shooting is to reduce the number of feeding birds at the fish ponds. The Dagda country authority has requested permits to shoot Great Cormorants in 2012 and 2013.

In 2012 in Latvia, the authorities permitted management of the Great Cormorant population at the Nagli fish pond complex. However, there was evidence of illegal shooting of adult birds in the nests in at least one colony during the breeding season in 2012 and possibly earlier. In some areas, human disturbance during the start of the breeding season caused Great Cormorants to abandon the colony (Aluksne Lake in Vidzeme region).

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### References and supplementary information

Latvia Birds Fund <http://www.latvijaspusti.lv/en/juraskrauklis.html>



Great Cormorant nests low in the trees at Kanieris lake, Latvia, June 2012. Photo: Karlis Millers.