

THE GREEN HERONS

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT



TO CULL OR NOT TO CULL

THE DEBATE

NO UNIVERSAL CONSENSUS

- ▶ Whether you should cull cormorants for the health of wetlands is a highly debated topic among ecologists, wildlife managers, and anglers, with no universal consensus. Broadly localized culling is sometimes used to protect specific endangered plant communities or colonial waterbird habitats, but scientists generally agree that large-scale or province-wide culls lack strong ecological justification.
- ▶ Sounds like...you can't blow stuff out of the sky...but lets dive deeper.



I KINDA LIKE THEM...

LEADER SPECIES RESEARCH

Physical Appearance

- **Size:** Measures 28 to 35 inches long with a wingspan of about 4 feet.
- **Colors:** Adults feature matte-black feathers, striking aquamarine eyes, and a bright blue interior of the mouth.
- **The Crest:** They get their name from a temporary "double crest" of black or white curly feathers behind the eyes during the breeding season.

Unique Behaviors

- **Wing-Drying:** Their feathers are less waterproof than most waterbirds because they produce less preening oil. This water-soaking helps them dive with agility, but they must stand with wings spread wide in the sun to dry off.
- **Hunting:** They dive from the surface and use their webbed feet to propel themselves underwater, chasing and eating mostly fish.
- **Nesting:** They build bulky stick nests in trees or on the ground and often incorporate human debris like rope, plastic, and deflated balloons.



ARGUMENTS FOR CULLING (LOCALIZED MANAGEMENT)

- ▶ There is an argument that hyperabundant cormorant populations can severely degrade specific land and wetland habitats.
- ▶ Dense colonies leave highly acidic droppings (guano) that coat leaves, alter soil chemistry, and eventually kill trees and understory. Targeted culling is used on Middle Island to protect rare Carolinian forest canopy and species at risk. (We know we have American Eels, turtles, mussels, eagles, etc...are we similar to Middle Island? Need to compare)
- ▶ Displacement of other species is possible because colonies can outcompete other waterbirds, however we saw Blue and Green Herons occupying the same wetland without obvious concern.
- ▶ Localized fish populations can be depleted (more often in closed aquatic systems - not us) and extreme pressures COULD be placed on local fish populations, however declining fish stocks and wetland degradation is primarily caused by human activity. Things like overfishing, pollution, climate change, and habitat destruction are most likely accelerated by human interference over cormorant populations. Is the cormorant a scape-goat?

ARGUMENTS AGAINST CULLING

- ▶ In many regions of the Great Lakes, cormorant diet consists of invasive problematic fish like the round goby and alewife. Cormorants are actually performing a vital ecological service.
- ▶ The modification of vegetation and introduction of guano is a natural, thousands of years old ecological process. This waste cycles nitrogen and phosphorus back into the water, feeding essential microorganisms.
- ▶ Lethal shooting scare away and sometimes harm other sensitive nesting waterbirds sharing the same space. (Like the Green Heron in the mix)
- ▶ Cormorants are actually resurging from the mid-20th century when hunting and DDT pushed the species to near-extinction. Some would celebrate their arrival just as we do bald eagles.
- ▶ Conservation groups like Wetlands International Europe argue that public hunts lack scientific backing, fail to address root causes of ecosystem issues (POLLUTION - hence the dumpster), and disturbs other wildlife. Non-lethal deterrents or highly tailored site-specific interventions are required. So lets keep observing, make sure we aren't adding to the problem, and enjoy our outdoor spaces!

OUR DECISION

- ▶ To cull or not to cull...that is the question.
- ▶ Tuesday votes: No cull
- ▶ Wednesday votes: No cull
- ▶ Thursday votes: No cull

VERDICT

- ▶ Ecological study required for more information. Monitoring continuing - so far trees are recovering, other species still visiting.

