**Great cormorant**

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

Order: *Pelecaniformes*

Family: *Phalacrocoracidae* (cormorants)

External appearance

Body length: 121–149 cm; weight: 1.8–3.0 kg. A goose-sized bird with a long neck. Adult plumage is black with a metallic iridescence. Young birds have a pale throat and belly.

Distribution

Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia; in North America, only on the north-eastern coast. In the Western Hemisphere it is also found in Greenland. Great cormorants who breed in Europe spend the winter along the Atlantic coast, in the North and Baltic Seas, in the Mediterranean region, and inland in some places. In Latvia cormorants are found in fish-rich lakes, ponds, and the Baltic Sea.

Diet

Feeds mainly on a variety of fish. The cormorant can dive to depths up to 4 m in search of food, but it often hunts in shallow waters as well.

Breeding

Nests in colonies. Nests are usually made of dry twigs in trees or bushes growing in the water or on islands. They can also nest on land. Cormorants lay clutches of 3–4 eggs. The great cormorant was relatively rare in Latvia, especially inland, until the late 1970s. Breeding was first recorded in 1989, in Lake Lubāns. Today several thousand pairs of great cormorants nest in Latvia.

Cormorants and humans

In the recent past, cormorants almost went extinct in Europe because fishermen considered them as competitors for fish. The cormorants were brutally hunted, but thanks to conservation efforts, their population has recovered. But as the population has recovered, the old conflicts with fishermen have reemerged.

Interesting facts

When flying in a flock, they often form irregularly shaped lines or the classic V formation. Uninformed people often mistake them for geese.