

Double-crested Cormorants



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Some people view Double-crested Cormorants as ugly, dirty, noisy, disgusting and even evil.

I find them to be fascinating creatures extremely well-adapted to their niche in the ecosystem.

They even qualify as urban wildlife!

Let's look at some of their characteristics.

Length:
70-90 cm
27-35 in.





Wingspan: 114-123 cm, 45-48 in.



The eyes are striking. They are thought to have special adaptations for underwater vision.



Mallard



Double-crested Cormorant

Clearly, these birds use their beaks in different ways.

The cormorant uses its beak to catch fish.

Let's look at
some more
characteristics.





The feet are:

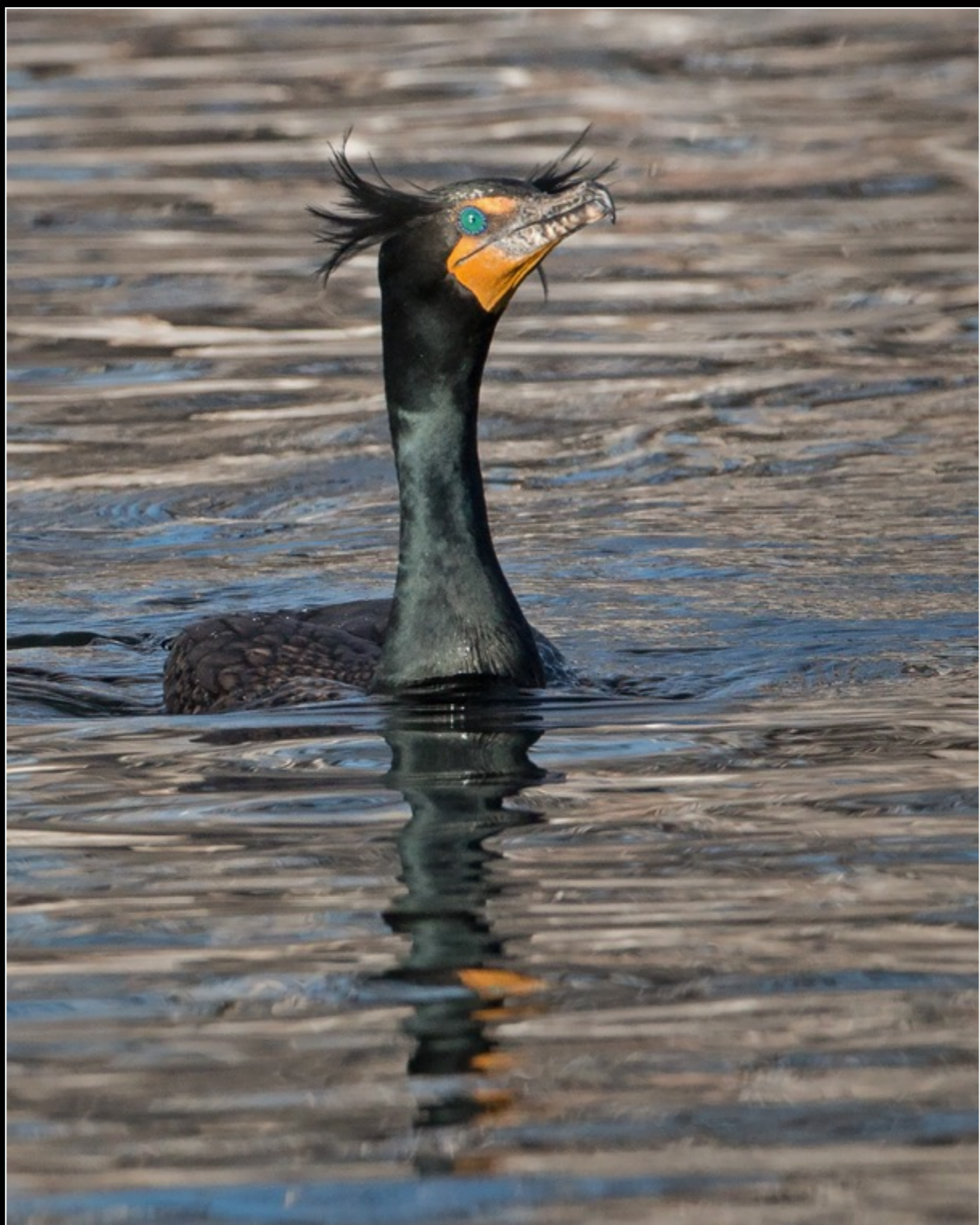
- Webbed for swimming and
- Prehensile for perching.



During breeding season the head is decorated with

- Double-crests,
- Brightly colored skin on the face and
- Blue color inside the mouth.

Crests vary in color from black to “salt and pepper” to white. White crests are most common on the West Coast, but they do appear locally...







Double-crested
Cormorants are
divers. They lack
buoyancy.



Compare the
cormorant to a
dabbling duck like
a Gadwall.

Double-crested
Cormorants
spend a lot of
time drying
their wings.



Unlike many other birds, cormorants have “wettable” feathers to facilitate diving. After cormorants dive their feathers need to dry out.

Cormorants are also predominantly black. Let's look at the coloring of some other birds that fish for subsistence...



American White Pelican



Female Belted Kingfisher



Male Common Merganser



Great Blue Herons



Ospreys



Reddish Egret



Snowy Egret



Tricolored Heron



Hooded Merganser

These birds fish from above the water. Most have either white or light-colored underparts that prey will have difficulty seeing from below. Not one has a black belly.

Cormorants dive and approach prey from below. Being black makes it difficult for their prey to see them from above.

Usually, Double-crested Cormorants bring a caught fish to the surface and wrestle with it until it can be swallowed head first...







Having a strong, flexible throat is a big advantage!

Dealing with the bones is a problem. It was only after some reading that I realized what this immature Double-crested Cormorant was doing...









I now believe that it was ejecting a pellet containing bones and other undigestibles.

Cormorants that are still being fed by their parents, apparently do not eject pellets. Probably this is because their food is already partly digested...







Cormorants nest in colonies of varying character and size.





Rookery neighbors don't always get along with each other.

Males select a nest site and display to attract a female.

The nest in the following photos is likely a remnant from the pervious year...









Courtship follows...









Males then gather sticks and other materials and bring them to females who make the nest...











Both parents share nesting duties.

Clutch size: 1-7 eggs

Broods: 1-2 per year

Incubation: 25-28 days

Fledging: 21-28 days

Maturity: 3 years

Lifespan: up to 22 years

Conservation

- Like other birds high on the food chain, cormorants were severely impacted by DDT. Their population is now recovering.
- Cormorants are sometimes slaughtered because they get blamed for declining fish populations. In fact unlike the human population, which has a variety of food sources, cormorant populations fluctuate with the available supply of fish.
- Currently (May 2015), the National Audubon Society and several other organizations are suing the Army Corps of Engineers and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to prevent the slaughter of 11,000 double-crested cormorants in the Columbia River Valley.

Additional Information



English name: Double-crested Cormorant

Scientific name: *Phalacrocorax auritus*

IBP & BBL 4-letter code: DCCO

Numerical information presented here is based on data published at
http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Double-crested_Cormorant/lifehistory

A link to the most recent version of this document is maintained at
<http://stockerphotos.com/blog/>

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IBP: Institute for Bird Populations

BBL: Bird Banding Laboratory