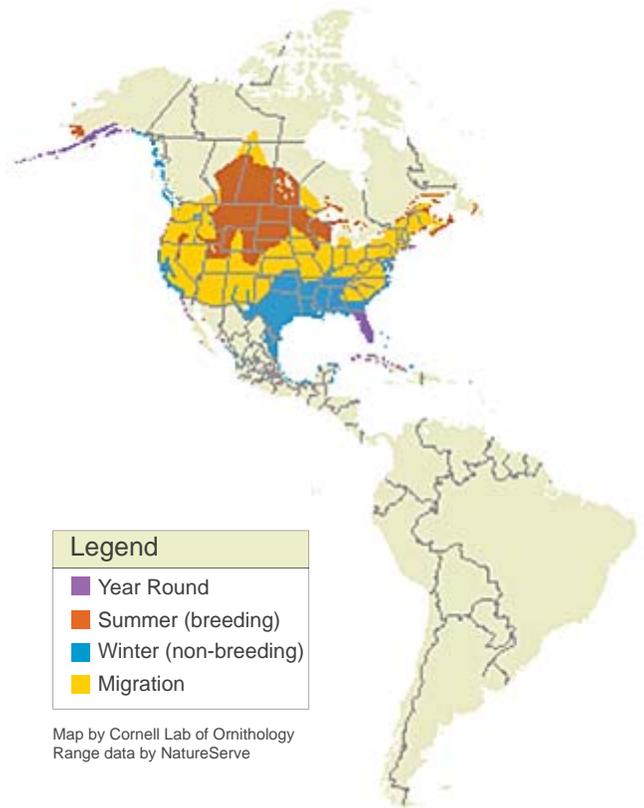


Double-crested Cormorant

Phalacrocorax auritus

The gangly Double-crested Cormorant is a prehistoric-looking, matte-black fishing bird with yellow-orange facial skin. Though they look like a combination of a goose and a loon, they are relatives of frigatebirds and boobies and are a common sight around fresh and salt water across North America—perhaps attracting the most attention when they stand on docks, rocky islands, and channel markers, their wings spread out to dry. These solid, heavy-boned birds are experts at diving to catch small fish.



Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Double-crested Cormorants are large waterbirds with small heads on long, kinked necks. They have thin, strongly hooked bills, roughly the length of the head. Their heavy bodies sit low in the water.

Color Pattern

Adults are brown-black with a small patch of yellow-orange skin on the face. Immatures are browner overall, palest on the neck and breast. In the breeding season, adults develop a small double crest of stringy black or white feathers.

Behavior

Double-crested Cormorants float low on the surface of water and dive to catch small fish. After fishing, they stand on docks, rocks, and tree limbs with wings spread open to dry. In flight, they often travel in V-shaped flocks that shift and reform as the birds alternate bursts of choppy flapping with short glides.

Habitat

Double-crested Cormorants are the most widespread cormorant in North America, and the one most frequently seen in freshwater. They breed on the coast as well as on large inland lakes. They form colonies of stick nests built high in trees on islands or in patches of flooded timber.

Cool Facts

- Cormorants often stand in the sun with their wings spread out to dry. They have less preen oil than other birds, so their feathers can get soaked rather than shedding water like a duck's. Though this seems like a problem for a bird that spends its life in water, wet feathers probably make it easier for cormorants to hunt underwater with agility and speed.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 27.6 - 35.4 inches
- Wingspan - 44.9 - 48.4 inches
- Weight - 42.3 - 88.2 ounces