



On the Watch
June Hitchcox

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DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

Double-crested Cormorants are one of several different Cormorants: Great – Brandt’s – Pelagic etc. but these are the only ones that live both inland and along the ocean. They nest from James Bay south through the U.S.A. In Doug Saddle’s 1982 book, “Our Heritage of Birds”, he states that the Peterborough area has recorded 12 sightings up to that time, in Spring, Summer and Fall. What has prompted this article is that many people have been seeing hundreds of black birds,

in long, long lines (sometimes in wedge formation), just off the shores of Oakville on Lake Ontario flying barely above the water and have been wondering what they are. Well, they are Double-crested Cormorants. They fly by my Bronte apartment toward Toronto in the morning and back in the afternoon towards Hamilton – apparently they are nesting on the rocks at Hamilton Bay. They eat fish - so there must be a source to the east.

Cormorants are big - about the size of a goose: 30” – 35” long with a wing-spread of 52”. Adults are black except for bare orange skin around the eyes down and including their neck pouch which is where they put the fish that they catch. By fluttering their neck pouch, air is forced to circulate in their lungs, which helps them to lose heat in hot weather. Their legs are set back to help them swim quickly – but that also makes it difficult for them to walk on land. When flying,



they hold their necks in a slight kink just behind the head. They make no sound when flying. When swimming, the bill is slanted upward and they are often submerged up to the neck. They dive for food with a leaping entry not a dive from the air. Their feathers are not water proof so you may see one on an open perch, standing with wings out, facing into the wind, to dry them.

They are interesting birds but have their draw-backs. They nest in colonies and their weight + acidic droppings eventually kill the trees and the smell is terrible. A cottage nearby would not be pleasant. However, they are part of Nature and in the long run, Nature usually balances everything out. Seeing them fly in such massive numbers in the last month has been quite a sight.

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