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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*

The Double-crested Cormorant is well-known to Floridians because it occurs abundantly along heavily populated coastal areas of the state. Fishermen are frequently amazed at the length of time it remains below the surface of the water seeking out its prey, which is almost exclusively fish. During the winter months, when the Florida population is augmented by birds that breed farther north, flocks of many thousands can be seen, especially at coastal locations. Double-crested Cormorants breed from southwestern Alaska and southern Canada south to California, southeast Texas, the Gulf coast, the Bahamas, and Cuba. Cormorants which breed in Florida tend to be smaller than those breeding farther north (Stevenson and Anderson 1994).

Habitat. Double-crested Cormorants breed in colonies ranging from fewer than a dozen nests to several hundred or more. They frequently nest with other colonial-nesting species. Colonies are most often on vegetated coastal barrier and dredge-spoil islands, but are also found on wooded islands in rivers, marshes, and phosphate settling ponds. Nests are compactly built of large sticks and moss, usually covered with excreta, and are placed 3 to 12 m (10 to 40 ft) above the ground or water. Cypress trees are frequently used inland, while most coastal colonies are built in mangroves (Howell 1932). Three or 4 pale blue or green eggs, with a thick chalky covering, are incubated by both adults for about 28 days. Young birds first fly after 6 to 8 weeks and become independent at 10 weeks age. Nesting may occur during most months of the year.

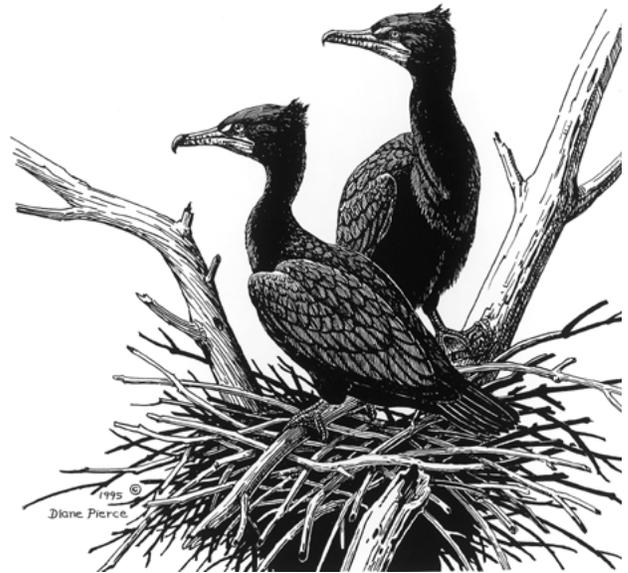


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Cormorants capture fish by diving from the surface of the water, sometimes to a depth of 100 ft.

Seasonal Occurrence. Double-crested Cormorants are common winter residents throughout Florida, except in the interior of the Panhandle. They breed throughout the peninsula and the Keys northwest to Wakulla County, although few Double-crested Cormorants nest in north Florida or the Panhandle. The breeding season may last from early December through late September, depending on geographic location (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The numbers of wintering Double-crested Cormorants usually increase with the influx of northern migrants, particularly on the coast. Northern populations are currently undergoing dramatic increases in their numbers.

Status. On the east coast, major nesting areas occur from Volusia County south to Martin County and from Duval County southward into Florida Bay and the Lower Keys. On the Gulf coast, Double-crested Cormorants colonies are common from Cedar Key south into Lee County. Inland lakes, marshes, and phosphate mine settling ponds provide other nesting sites. Several small colonies do regularly occur in the central and northern Everglades, although they do not appear on the Atlas map.

Although the species appears to be increasing in numbers during the winter (Stevenson and Anderson 1994), the numbers of breeding pairs and numbers of large colonies (>100 individuals) have recently decreased. During statewide surveys conducted between 1976 and 1978, Nesbitt et al. (1982) found more than 28,000 breeding birds. However, Runde et al. (1991) found only 16,000 breeding birds statewide in surveys between 1986 and 1989. As with Brown Pelicans, Double-crested Cormorant populations are likely to respond to fluctuations in stocks of inland and coastal fisheries.

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Double-crested Cormorant

