

OLIVACEOUS CORMORANT — FIRST RECORD FOR CANADA

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The morning of 8 September 1989 in Regina was a dull one, overcast, with occasional brief light rain showers. About 10:00 a.m. I was walking eastward on the north side of Wascana Lake and when I was opposite the north end of Willow Island I left the asphalt walkway and crossed an open area towards a gap in the dense carragana hedge which grows along the bank. The instant I reached the gap a cormorant skittered along the water in panic and flew westward out of sight. It was about 15 m from me when it took off. I thought, "What a small cormorant! And why the panic?" The Double-crested Cormorants which frequent Wascana Lake in spring and fall often allow a fairly close approach, and then usually dive rather than fly.

Later, at about 11:30 a.m., I had reached the south end of Albert Memorial Bridge at the west end of Wascana Lake and was walking north over it when the thought struck me that the small cormorant may have joined the few Double-cresteds that are often on the deep water on the east side of the bridge (which contains a weir), so I stopped at a bench and scanned the water. Sure enough! With four Double-cresteds I could see the small one swimming placidly, and through my binoculars I could see that its neck was noticeably thinner and shorter than that of the others; the gular pouch was a dull yellow, with some white on either side. The front of the neck and that part of the breast visible was also yellowish, indistinguishable from the pouch colour at that distance (ca. 25 m). The most noticeable feature was its small size compared with the Double-cresteds.

My car was parked nearby and shortly I was describing the bird to Paul James, Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History staff. Since it was nearly noon I decided to go and look, as the locale was nearby. I told him to look for a small cormorant, about half the size of the others.

After I got home about 12:30 p.m. I called Robert Kreba at his home and when I had described the bird to him he offered an identification as an Olivaceous Cormorant, because that small cormorant had been seen in South Dakota. Regrettably, neither Paul James nor Robert Kreba were able to find the bird I had seen, nor did anyone else.

Once Bob had given me the clue I searched the bird books I had for a positive identification. Robbins pictured an immature Olivaceous with the light streak on the foreneck and white on the face that reaches the Louisiana Coast where it breeds. Lowery states: "The body of this species is about half as large in bulk as that of the Double-crested Cormorant" so my remarks to Paul James were correct as to size. Lowery also notes: "Immature of the two species in the first winter plumage are indistinguishable from each other in the field except by size."⁸

The normal range of the Olivaceous Cormorant extends from the Louisiana coast south to Tierra del Fuego on coastal waters and fresh lakes and streams. My own records are of observations at Mazatlan, Mexico (1975), Trinidad (1976), Belize (1978) and Panama (1979) but I do not recall seeing immature birds which the Wascana bird obviously was.

French notes that the Olivaceous Cormorant is a game bird in Trinidad and Tobago.⁴ My experience in Mexico leads me to suggest that these birds are also taken for the pot, along with anything else that's edible. This would explain the erratic flight I saw.

This cormorant in the literature has been known as Neotropic, Brazilian, Mexican, and Bigua, but Olivaceous is the name now used.

The Olivaceous Cormorant often appears on the California coast, and there are some inland records. Possibly those do not occur in the Gulf of California and farther north as there are records in southeastern Arizona at Lake Patagonia;² El Paso, Texas (31 Jan., 10 Feb. 1983), and Nebraska (Oct. 1982);¹⁰ at Lake Tahoe, Nevada (16 Dec. 1978, 12 March 1979);⁵ Lamar, Colorado (17 July - August 1988); Pierre South Dakota (3 July - 5 August 1985 - first state record);³ Pierre, S. Dakota, (23 June 1987 - second state record).¹

I have searched the "Indexes of bold-faced birds" of *American Birds* and its predecessor *Audubon Field Notes* back to 1921 (1967), as well as every issue of *Birds in Canada*, and the indexes of *Canadian Field-naturalist* and its predecessors back to 1924, without finding any mention of Olivaceous (Neotropic) Cormorant. The books *Birds of Canada*, revised edition, and *The Field-naturalist's guide to the Victoria region* do not record it, nor does the *Checklist of Birds of Victoria and Southeastern Vancouver Island* (May 1989). If any bird were banded north along the Pacific coast to Canada the latter two publications probably would have recorded such a prominent event. In addition I wrote to Robert Nero in Winnipeg, but he knew of no sightings for Manitoba, and also Alan Worthington, of Point Pelee National Park, who stated "There is definitely no

record of Olivaceous Cormorant in Canada ..." I believe my sighting of one on 8 September 1989 on Wascana Lake in Regina is the first for Canada.

I thank Robert Nero and Alan Worthington for their assistance.

I offer the above sighting of an Olivaceous Cormorant as an addition to the hypothetical list of Saskatchewan birds.

¹ BERKEY, G.B. 1987. The nesting season, June 1 - July 31, 1987. *Am. Birds* 41(3):

² DAVIS, W.A. and S.M. RUSSELL. 1979. Birds in southeastern Arizona. Tucson Audubon Soc., Tucson.

³ FAANES, C.A. 1985. The nesting season, June 1 - July 31, 1985. *Am. Birds* 39(5):

⁴ FFRENCH, RICHARD. 1973. A guide to the birds of Trinidad and Tobago. Livingston Publ. Co., Wynnewood, Pa.

⁵ KINGERY, H.E. 1979. The winter season, Dec. 1, 1978 - Feb 28, 1979. *Am. Birds* 33(3):

⁶ KINGERY, H.E. 1979. The spring migration, Mar. 1 - May 31, 1979. *Am. Birds* 33(5):

⁷ KINGERY, H.E. 1985. The nesting season, June 1 - July 31, 1985. *Am. Birds* 42(5):

⁸ LOWERY, G.H., Jr. 1960. Louisiana birds. Louisiana State Univ. Press, Baton Rouge

⁹ ROBBINS, C.S. 1966. Birds of North America. Golden Press, N.Y.

¹⁰ WILLIAMS, FRANCES. 1983. The winter season, Dec. 1, 1982 - Feb. 28, 1983. *Am. Birds* 37(3):