

Lake Champlain Land Trust

One Main Street, Burlington, VT 05401 (802) 862-4150 info@lclt.org www.lclt.org



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Cormorant Facts

Nesting: in colonies on the ground or in trees; will renest.

Breeds: at 3 years old

Clutch: 3 to 4 eggs

Incubation Period: 25-29 days

Fly: at 5-6 weeks

Independent: 10 weeks

Swims: 35 days

Life Span: 6 years
 Average, may live to 20.

Length: 29-36 in.

Wing Span: 54 in.

Weight: 6 lbs.

Feed: by diving and catching fish in waters up to 25 ft. deep

Migrates: in fall to mid-Atlantic and Gulf States.

Glossary

Cormorants spend their time nesting, roosting, feeding and migrating.

Nesting: A bird's activities while building a nest or incubating and raising young. Cormorants prefer

Double-Crested Cormorants on Lake Champlain

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Picture courtesy of Tony Northrup
www.northrup.org

The Lake Champlain Land Trust appreciates the intrinsic value of all native species. Nevertheless, we support legal and appropriate efforts to control nesting cormorants on islands on which we hold conservation easements, when necessary to maintain balance among native species.

FAQs

If you have any questions about Double-Crested Cormorants that were not answered here, please feel free to email your question to us at: [I have a Cormorant question.](mailto:info@lclt.org) (info@lclt.org). We will be happy to try to answer your question or direct you to a resource.

What Are Double-Crested Cormorants?

Double-Crested Cormorants are migratory seabirds that spend the warm months in northern oceans and lakes, such as the Great Lakes and Lake Champlain, and spend the cold months in the mid-Atlantic and Gulf States. They are large black birds, 29 to 36 inches long with a wing span of about 54 inches. They weigh about 6 pounds. Their diet consists of small fish, which they catch by diving and pursuing under water.

Are Double-Crested Cormorants Native To Lake Champlain?

Cormorants are native to North America. The Double-Crested Cormorant is the most common of the six North American cormorant species. The highest numbers of Double-Crested Cormorants are found in the Great Lakes. Cormorants were not reported on Lake Champlain until the 1930s, and did not establish a significant population on Lake Champlain until the 1980s. The Cormorant population grew substantially in the 1990s, and continues to grow at a slower rate. The Cormorant population on Lake Champlain is expected to stabilize over time.

to nest in trees but will nest on the ground if trees are not available.

Roosting: A bird's activities while resting, preening or drying themselves, generally on rocks or and sometimes in trees.

Migrating: A bird's activities while in transit on migratory pathways. Local Cormorant populations swell in the spring and in the fall, before and after nesting seasons, while Cormorants that are nesting elsewhere migrate along Lake Champlain.

Are Double-Crested Cormorants A Protected Species?

Double-Crested Cormorants are among approximately 800 native birds protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. The protections of the MTA have been adopted by the United States, Canada, Mexico, Japan and other countries. Authorized representatives of state and federal governments and other organizations who hold a permit under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act manage Cormorant populations. Permits may be issued to private individuals in certain circumstances.

Why Are Double-Crested Cormorants Considered A Nuisance Species on Lake Champlain?

There are many lovely small islands in Lake Champlain, some of which have one or more seasonal homes. When Cormorants nest on an island, they use twigs from adjacent trees and shrubs for nest materials, leaving behind denuded vegetation. Nesting and roosting Cormorants also create large quantities of guano which can eventually kill vegetation on the island and prevent new vegetation from growing. Once Cormorants begin nesting on an island their numbers increase making the island unsuitable for other species such as the Spotted Salamander which is an endangered species in Vermont. Denuded islands are also not suitable for hiking, beaching, picnicking or swimming and are often accompanied by the presence of large quantities of guano. For aesthetic reasons, many people object to seeing islands overtaken by Cormorants and guano.

Some people believe Cormorants eat too much of the local fish population. This is a particular concern to local residents, conservationists, scientists, and professional anglers. Research conducted on Lake Champlain has shown that Double-Crested Cormorants eat primarily yellow perch. It is unknown if the presence of Cormorants have a significant impact on the population of yellow perch in Lake Champlain.

What Should Landowners Do When They Find Cormorants On Their Property?

Private individuals are not allowed to disturb Double-Crested Cormorants. If land owners can call the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife at 800-255-3838 they will be directed to the appropriate individual.

What Cormorant Management Techniques Are Used By Authorized Authorities?

If Cormorants are nesting on an island, population growth can be controlled by the application of vegetable oil on their eggs. The oil prevents the eggs from hatching and any attempts to move on to another nesting area are unsuccessful. This is not a short term solution, because the Cormorants will continue to nest on the island during the nesting season when the eggs are oiled, until they give up on the island. They also may continue to use the island for roosting, even if the eggs are oiled.

Another technique is to remove the Cormorants' nests. While removing nests may prevent reproduction for a particular year, the Cormorants will rebuild the nests in the same location, or build a new nest in a new location, resulting in only a temporary reduction in reproduction rates. For example, on Rock Island in St. Albans Bay, Vermont, the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife has been removing Cormorant nests to control Cormorants and thus protect the island's vegetation.

Tern, an endangered species in Vermont.

One of the many challenges presented in Cormorant control is that Cormorants do not always roost and nest in the same location. Although Cormorants can do more damage where they roost rather than where they nest, the most effective and humane control measures focus on the nests. Cormorants generate quantities of guano where they roost and can denude a roosting island while nesting elsewhere. Keeping Cormorants from roosting on an island requires netting the trees or otherwise making the island unappealing for roosting, which of course also makes it unappealing for other species as well. If the purpose of keeping the Cormorants away is to preserve the island's aesthetic appeal or keep the island available for other bird species, the techniques for stopping Cormorant roosting generally defeat the intended purposes as well.

If Cormorants are roosting in a particular location and nesting elsewhere, the only effective way to encourage them to roost somewhere else is to harass them while they roost. This requires a significant commitment of time and energy, to routinely harass the birds when they return to roost.

Encouraging Cormorants to leave a particular site can have unintended consequences, however. The Cormorants may select another nesting or roosting site that is equally sensitive or scenic. Also, some Cormorants may move on to another nesting site while others remain at the current site, thereby spreading the Cormorants to more locations on the Lake. Moving Cormorants off of one location can cause friction with other property owners, or even friction between states or local governments, if one party moves the Cormorants into the other party's property or jurisdiction. On balance, in some cases it may be better to allow Cormorants to colonize certain locations rather than forcing them to move all around the region and perhaps colonize many more locations.

Shooting Cormorants can be allowed under federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act permits if it is demonstrated that nonlethal control techniques are not effective. For example, shooting may be allowed at commercial freshwater aqua culture facilities (fish farms) in the southeast United States, because Cormorants are known to appear at fish farms only to gorge themselves at feeding time while nesting and roosting in other locations.

Do Cormorants Make Any Positive Contribution To The Local Habitat?

All native species play a role in maintaining equilibrium in the natural environment. Of course, if one species dominates and there is no natural predator or dietary limit on their population growth, imbalance can occur. At present there is no consensus in the conservation community as to how to maintain balance with Double-Crested Cormorants.

Let's consider an example. The Lake Champlain Land Trust has conserved several islands that serve as nesting grounds for Common Terns. Common Terns and Double-Crested Cormorants can nest or roost on the same islands. If the Cormorant population becomes too large or the Cormorants denude the island, the Common Terns will move to find new nesting locations. The goal should be to maintain balance between Common Terns and Cormorants on any given nesting location, and thus avoid destruction of the island habitat by the Cormorants.

What Position Does The Lake Champlain Land Trust Take With Regard To Cormorant Control?

As an organization dedicated to saving habitat for migratory birds on Lake Champlain, such as Common Terns, the Lake Champlain Land Trust supports the idea that Double-Crested Cormorants are entitled to share Lake Champlain and its islands along

with other bird species. Some control measures may be necessary to ensure that Cormorants share the Lake's resources rather than dominating and depleting the resources to the detriment of other species. We work in conjunction with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Audubon Vermont to determine on a case by case basis whether Cormorant management measures should be implemented in any given year at each island under our management.

The Lake Champlain Land Trust supports efforts to control nesting Cormorants on islands on which we hold conservation easements, when deemed necessary by appropriate management authorities to maintain balance among native species on Lake Champlain. Cormorants have established nests on four islands on which the Lake Champlain Land Trust holds conservation easements: Woods Island, Rock Island (Panton), and Mud Island, which are under State management, and Rock Island (St. Albans) which is managed by the Audubon Vermont. The Lake Champlain Land Trust has supported efforts deemed necessary and undertaken by the State and Audubon Vermont to control Cormorants on Rock Island (Panton), Mud Island and Rock Island (St. Albans). On Rock Island (Panton) and Mud Island, located near each other, the State undertook control measures prior to 1996 and Cormorants have not returned to those islands in subsequent years. Cormorants only appeared on Woods Island for one nesting season and have not returned in subsequent years, so the State has not taken any steps to control Cormorants on Woods Island.



Other Cormorant Resources on the Internet:

[U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Division of Migratory Bird Management](#), Final Environmental Impact Statement of Double-crested Cormorants (<http://migratorybirds.fws.gov/issues/cormorant/cormorant.html>)

[Status of the Double-crested Cormorant \(Phalacrocorax auritus\) in North America](#). Final Report to USFWS
http://web.tiscali.it/no-redirect-tiscali/sv2001/cormo_abstract/2001-2.htm

[The Cormorant Conundrum](#).
Excellent article about UVM Professor Dave Capen's approach to cormorant control. Dave also helped found our Land Trust.
<http://www.uvm.edu/outreach/main/?Page=News&storyID=5123>

[Double-crested Cormorants](#) - Description by Audubon
http://www.audubon.org/bird/BoA/F41_G1b.html

[Double-crested Cormorants](#) - Excellent photos and description, Saltgrassflats
http://www.saltgrassflats.com/birds/cormorant_dbldcrested.html

[Double-crested Cormorants](#) - USGS, photos, descriptions, song, and migration maps. <http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/id/framlst/i1200id.html>

[Double-crested Cormorants](#) - Natureworks
<http://www.nhptv.org/natureworks/doublecorm.htm>

[The Rise of the Double-crested Cormorant on the Great Lakes: Winning the War Against Contaminants](#). Environment Canada.
http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/wildlife/fact_sheets/fs_cormorants-e.html



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Saving Our Lakeshore and Natural Areas

Lake Champlain Land Trust One Main Street, Burlington, VT 05401 802.862.4150 or info@LCLT.org