



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Double-crested Cormorant
*Phalacrocorax auritus***

State Status: **None**
Federal Status: **None**

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The Double-crested Cormorant is a large, dark-colored diving bird. The adults have black or dark-brown plumage, with a dull greenish or bronze gloss and orange-yellow skin on the face and throat. The “double crest” feathers located on the top of the head are a poor field mark, as they are not always visible and are only fully developed for a short time early in the year. They can also be difficult to observe them while swimming, as they tend to submerge most of their body and only their head and neck are visible. They are most evident at daytime resting places where they often hold their wings spread wide, drying their feathers in the sun.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: The most numerous and wide spread of the six North American cormorants, this species is distributed over much of North America. They breed as far north as Alaska and spend the winters as far south as Nicaragua. Although this species has greatly increased its range in Massachusetts over the last several decades, colonial waterbird surveys indicate a 19.5% decline in the state from 1994-95 to 2006-08.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: Double-crested Cormorants are a colonially nesting species and will establish colonies at areas safe from predators and close to their feeding grounds. They eat mostly fish, but will also take crustaceans, eels and amphibians. Their breeding habitat includes ponds, lakes, slow-moving rivers, lagoons, estuaries, and open coastline. They prefer to nest on small rocky or sandy islands, bridges, abandoned docks, and on emergent vegetation in marshes.

Migrating south for the winter, they look for areas with feeding, loafing and roosting sites. They may assemble in the thousands on sandbars in coastal inlets.



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THREATS: Environmental pollutants and toxins could affect local populations. Because this species often nests on the ground and close to the high tide line, rising sea level could reduce their breeding productivity.

REFERENCES:

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- Melvin, S. 2010. Survey of coastal nesting colonies of cormorants, gulls, night herons, and ibises in Massachusetts, 2006-08. Final Report. Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program of the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.
- Walsh, J., and W.R. Petersen. 2013. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and Scott & Nix, Inc.

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A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan

Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

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