

## Double-crested Cormorant Nesting in South Carolina

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For many years the Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) has been suspected of nesting in South Carolina. Wayne (*Birds of South Carolina*, 1910, p. 12) saw Double-crested Cormorants on the coast during the summer, and he believed that they bred, although not "near salt water." The species has been nesting in North Carolina, in freshwater sites near the coast, since at least 1898. T.G. Pearson (*Birds of North Carolina*, 1942, p. 19) found the first North Carolina nest on 25 May 1898 at Great Lake in Craven County.

On 25 July 1985 at the east end of Lake Marion, Clarendon County, South Carolina, we saw a cormorant flying with a stick in its beak. We followed the bird in our boat for about 1 km to a tall dead tree near the center of the lake. The site is about 3 km from the lake's edge. The cormorant carried the stick to a nest about 17 m above water (Fig. 1). The nest was in a crotch off the main trunk. Another nest in the same tree, at about 14 m, had three young that were climbing out. The upper nest had eggs or small young, as an adult began brooding after it added the stick. High winds associated with Hurricane Bob prevented our searching further.

We returned to the colony 30 July and counted 15 nests that had brooding adults or that had large young in the nest. All the nests were too high to examine from above. In addition to the young in the 15 nests that were in use, we saw 16 juveniles. These presumably came from other nests, or from earlier, successful nestings of the pairs then brooding.

Average height above water of 10 nests was 9 m, with a range of 4-14 m. Eight of the dead trees held single nests, two had two, and one had three. The trees could not be identified, as the bark and foliage were gone, but they were probably Bald Cypress (*Taxodium distichum*). We doubt that any other species of trees would stand after 40 years' inundation. The colony covers a roughly circular area about 1 km in diameter. The average nearest neighbor distance between nine nest trees was 250 m; range, 5-1000 m.

On 11 August we returned to the site and noted that 10 nests were still being attended by adults.

The cormorants nesting in this colony presumably belong to the race *P. a. floridanus*, although specimens collected by Pearson at Great Lake, N.C., varied in size between typical *floridanus* and the northern race *P. a. auritus* (*Birds of North Carolina*, 1942, p. 19).

The large man-made lakes that have become common in the southeast may allow the Double-crested Cormorant to continue to expand its range inland, parallel to the coast. Indeed, in the summer of 1985 K. Kuyper (pers. comm.) found two or three nests of the species at Lake Jordan, near Raleigh, N.C. This record is the first instance of the species' breeding in the interior of North Carolina. Farther north the species, presumably represented by *P. a. auritus*, is moving southward along the Atlantic coast, and is nesting around Manhattan, New York (Kingbird 34:146-155, 1984). An isolated population now breeds at Hopewell, Virginia on the James River, over 100 km from the Atlantic (Wilson Bull. 92:127-128, 1980), but its geographic origin is unknown.

It is probable that Double-crested Cormorants have only recently begun to colonize the inland lakes of the Carolinas, as few large lakes existed before World War II. Wayne's (1910) summer sightings probably were vagrants, which have often occurred in coastal areas in the summer, far from known colonies.

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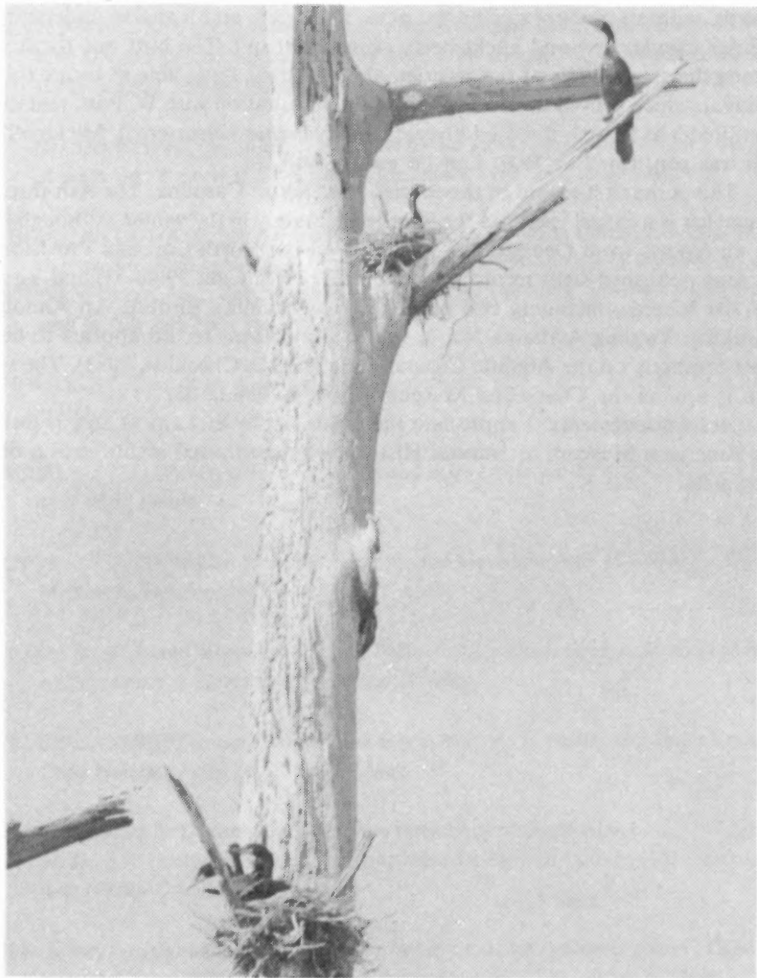


Fig.1 First nests of Double-crested Cormorant found in South Carolina. 25 July 1985, Lake Marion, Clarendon County.