

# DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

**Oneida Lake Status:  
Common**



*Cormorant colony on Oneida Lake  
(Photo credit: J Coleman)*



*Captured on Oneida Lake for research  
(Photo credit : J Coleman)*



*Mother and chick on Oneida Lake  
(Photo credit: J Grummer)*

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- Only water bird that lacks oil in the feathers
- First seen on Oneida Lake in 1984
- Oneida Lake population is actively managed

Cormorants are medium-to-large birds with dark plumage. They may be up to 27 inches tall with a 50 inch wingspan. Adults are entirely black, while juveniles have brownish backs and wings, pale throats, and chests that darken near the belly. Cormorants have yellow or orange colored skin on their faces, and their bills are long, thin, and sharply hooked.

Cormorants primarily eat fish, but will also eat aquatic invertebrates. After fishing, cormorants go ashore and can be seen holding their wings out in the sun to dry (photo at right). This is necessary because cormorants lack the waterproofing oils that other water birds produce. This may help them dive quickly, since the oil-less feathers do not retain air bubbles.



*Drying the wings after swimming*

Oneida Lake first saw cormorants in 1984 when a breeding pair migrated from Lake Ontario. By the year 2000, over 360 pairs of cormorants were established around the lake, most on Wantry and Long Islands. This increase led to the consumption of immense numbers of sub-adult walleye and yellow perch in the 1990's, and caused serious declines in adult populations of these fish. In response to this, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation began a cormorant management plan in 1998, and modified it in 2003. The plan limits the Oneida Lake resident cormorant colony to 100 birds and 20 nests, and hazes migrating cormorants to keep them off the lake. This program has been very effective in reaching its goals.