

To kick off the 1989 At a Glance series, we find the February bird to be, by virtue of its black dorsal coloration, long tail, slender neck, and slender hooked beak, a cormorant of some kind. Since there are only two cormorant species in the western North Atlantic, the choice is between the Great Cormorant and the Double-crested Cormorant. The latter is the common breeding cormorant in southern New England, normally arriving in late March and departing by early November. The Great Cormorant is most common from mid-October through mid-April, but there is a handful of recent breeding records from Boston Harbor and Buzzards Bay.

In adult plumage both species are more or less uniformly black. The Great Cormorant, however, possesses a chin strap of white feathers bordering its yellow throat pouch, along with white feather tufts on its flanks during the breeding season. In second-year individuals, the white throat feathering is more diffuse but is always extensive enough to distinguish the species from the Double-crested Cormorant, which also differs by having an orange, not yellow, throat pouch.

Identification of immature cormorants offers different problems. First-year Great Cormorants are brownish above and exhibit an unmarked whitish belly in contrast to a dusky, streaked neck, upper breast, and flanks. In comparison, immature Double-crested Cormorants are brownish above but show an unstreaked, pale, grayish-white neck and breast and a uniformly brown lower breast and belly. Yearlings in worn plumage are sometimes almost entirely whitish beneath, somewhat unlike the way the species is depicted in many popular field guides. In addition, the Double-crested Cormorant has a slenderer neck and bill than the Great Cormorant, the latter species also having a more angular-headed appearance and heavier "jowls" beneath the throat.



Photo by Wayne R. Petersen

The mystery cormorant is plainly an immature with a pale neck and belly. The bird also has an obviously dark upper breast and the suggestion of streaking on the flanks along the edge of the folded wing. These features, combined with the pale feathering on the throat, indicate that the pictured bird, which was photographed in July in a small pond near Gardner, Maine, is an immature Great Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax carbo*.

AT A GLANCE

Photo by Wayne R. Petersen



Can you identify this bird?

Identification will be discussed in next issue's AT A GLANCE.

We give avid birders something few binocular and telescope stores can.

Help.

We at the F.C. Meichsner Co. don't just talk to our customers about optical equipment. We listen to them, too.

And when you've been listening to people for 72 years, you can't help but learn a thing or two.

Like what birders want in a pair of binoculars—and what they don't.

So when you're about ready for a new spotting scope, binoculars, or repairs on equipment you already own, give us a call.

We accept most major credit cards, and we'd be happy to let you do most of the talking.



F.C. Meichsner Co.

182 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111
(617) 426-7092

