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THIRD RECORD OF THE NEOTROPIC CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) IN FLORIDA, WITH COMMENTS ON OTHER RECENT RECORDS

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On 3 June 2009, HPR discovered and photographed an adult Neotropical Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) along the dike separating Lake Apopka from Lake Apopka North Shore Restoration Area, Orange County, Florida. HPR found the cormorant again, and BHA studied and photographed it, on 5 June 2009. More than 40 birders, including HPR and BP, studied it on 7 June 2009 (Figs. 1, 2). It was viewed from the dike as it rested in a sweetbay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) with several Double-crested Cormorants (*P. auritus*) and several Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*). We estimate that the distance to the birds was 20-25 m. Durations of observation of the Neotropical Cormorant were 15 min on 3 June (1715-1730), 10 min on 5 June (1430-1435 and 1500-1505), and 45 min on 7 June (0915-1000). Despite frequent searches of the area by HPR and others, the cormorant was not seen after 7 June 2009.

Description.—On all three days, the Neotropical Cormorant was observed in direct comparison with several Double-crested Cormorants. It was a slimmer and perhaps 20% smaller than the other cormorants, with a proportionately shorter and thinner neck, a shorter and thinner bill, and a longer tail. The inner rectrices were longer than the outer rectrices, giving the tail a rounded appearance; the central-most rectrices were shorter than other proximal rectrices and appeared to be in



Figures 1 and 2. Adult Neotropic Cormorant at Lake Apopka North Shore Restoration Area, Orange County, Florida, 7 June 2009. This individual provides the third of six verifiable records in Florida, all during 2007-2010. Note the white border to the yellow gular patch that forms a point posterior and ventral to the eye, and the white filoplumes that extend posteriorly above and behind the white border. The eye is emerald-green, the bill grayish-brown, the legs and feet blackish, and the remaining plumage black with a faint bronzy iridescence. In direct comparison with Double-crested Cormorants (an immature is shown in Fig. 2), the Neotropic Cormorant was proportionately smaller with a shorter neck and proportionately shorter, thinner bill. Note also the rather long tail with shorter outer rectrices. The cormorants are perched in a sweet-bay magnolia (*Magnolia virginiana*) growing along the dike that separates the Restoration Area from Lake Apopka. Photographs by Bill Pranty.



Figure 2.

molt. Except for the head and neck, the plumage was entirely black with a faint bronzy iridescence, mostly on the wings and tail. The yellow gular patch was outlined by a moderately wide, white feathered border that formed a point posterior and ventral to the eye. Numerous

white filoplumes were visible on the hind head and the neck. The irides were emerald-green, the bill grayish-brown, and the legs and feet, including webbing, blackish. The plumage appeared fresh, with no sign of wear. The cormorant was not banded. No vocalizations were heard, and no interactions with the Double-crested Cormorants or Anhingas were noted. On 5 and 7 June, we observed the Neotropic Cormorant fly from the sweetbay magnolia and out over Lake Apopka, presumably to forage. The Florida Ornithological Society Records Committee (FOSRC) unanimously accepted this record (FOSRC 09-747) as representing a natural vagrant, and the third photographic record for Florida (Kratzer 2010).

Previous Florida records.—The two previous accepted records of Neotropic Cormorant in Florida have not been described formally. Both records referred to a single adult, perhaps the same individual, perched on the same rocky outcropping off Boca Chica Key in the Lower Keys, Monroe County. On 13 April 2007, Carl Goodrich discovered and photographed a Neotropic Cormorant (FOSRC 07-637) that was not seen again; it was perched near a Double-crested Cormorant, allowing a direct comparison (Pranty 2007, Kratzer 2008). On 12 January 2009, Goodrich again discovered and photographed a Neotropic Cormorant (FOSRC 09-714) perched with Double-crested Cormorants and Royal Terns (*Thalasseus maximus*). Unlike the previous record, this bird lingered to 17 February, allowing a few other observers to see it (Pranty 2009, Kratzer 2010).

Additional Florida records.—Remarkably, three additional photographic records of Neotropic Cormorant have surfaced since our sighting, resulting in six records during a 26-month period. One of the records pre-dated our sighting but was not reported for more than a year. On 5 June 2008, an adult Neotropic Cormorant was found entangled in fishing line but otherwise healthy at Mile Marker 100, Key Largo, Monroe County. The bird was brought to the Florida Keys Wild Bird Center rehabilitation facility, where it was photographed (FOSRC 09-745), and subsequently released nearby on 12 June 2008. It is possible, although unlikely, that the Key Largo cormorant was the same bird found at Boca Chica Key in 2007 and/or 2009. The straight-line distance between the two sites is 140 km.

Since the discovery of the Lake Apopka bird, there have been two subsequent records of Neotropic Cormorant in Florida. Neither of these records has yet been reviewed by the FOSRC, but we have examined the photographs and concur with the identifications. The first of these involved an adult cormorant discovered by Bonnie Hall and Chris Mason near the lighthouse at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Wakulla County, on 7 September 2009. This bird was still being seen through January 2010 (Pranty 2010a, b). The second recent

record involved an adult Neotropic Cormorant discovered by Thomas Dunkerton at South Central Regional Wastewater Treatment Facility (“Viera Wetlands”) at Viera, Brevard County, on 30 November 2009. This individual lingered until 2 December 2009 (Pranty 2010a). It is possible that the cormorant sightings at Lake Apopka and Viera refer to the same individual; the distance between the two sites is 93 km.

Distribution.—Neotropic Cormorants are widespread in much of the American tropics and are increasing in numbers and expanding their range in the United States (Telfair and Morrison 2005). They breed along the entire Texas coast, in southeastern Oklahoma, western Arkansas, southwestern Louisiana (more than 3,200 pairs in 2004), southern New Mexico, and southern Arizona, and are rare to casual east to coastal portions of Mississippi and Alabama (Telfair and Morrison 2005). Neotropic Cormorants are accidental in Tennessee (TOS 2009) and are unreported from Georgia (Beaton et al. 2003), North Carolina (CBC 2009a), and South Carolina (CBC 2009b). They have strayed to several states in the Great Plains and western Midwest, east to Pennsylvania (AOU 1998, Telfair and Morrison 2005). Farther south, Neotropic Cormorants are resident from most of Mexico south through Middle America and South America to Tierra del Fuego, Argentina (AOU 1998). Neotropic Cormorants are also resident in the West Indies. They are common and increasing in Cuba, including northern cays and the Isle of Youth; some colonies contain more than 1,000 pairs (Raffaele et al. 1998, Garrido and Kirkconnell 2000, Telfair and Morrison 2005), and they are locally common residents in the southern Bahamas, primarily at Great Inagua. Non-breeding birds range north to New Providence and Eleuthera, and vagrants have strayed to Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and St. Barthelemy and Dominica in the Lesser Antilles (Raffaele et al. 1998).

The one, two, or three Neotropic Cormorants documented in the Florida Keys presumably originated from Cuba, 160-205 km to the south. But the origins of the two or three other Neotropic Cormorants are less certain. We presume that the cormorants did not travel from the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico or Great Inagua, Bahamas because of the great over-water flights required. Based solely on the location of the nearest populations, we think it most likely that the cormorant at St. Marks NWR came from southwestern Louisiana, while the cormorant or cormorants at Lake Apopka and “Viera Wetlands” came from Cuba. It is also notable that while St. Marks NWR and the two Keys sites are coastal, the sites at Lake Apopka and “Viera Wetlands” are inland, the former especially so. “Viera Wetlands” is about 16 km from the Atlantic Ocean and 10 km from the Indian River, while Lake Apopka North Shore Restoration Area is about 104 km from the Gulf of Mexico and 92 km from the Atlantic Ocean.

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