

## NOTES

### FIRST SPECIMEN OF THE NEOTROPIC CORMORANT FROM THE BAJA CALIFORNIA PENINSULA, MEXICO

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On 7 February 2003, during a fish survey in the Ojo de Agua at Río La Purísima, about 20 km upstream of Carambucho, Baja California Sur (26° 19' 24.2" N, 111° 59' 09.7" W, altitude 195 m), I observed and photographed a Neotropic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax brasilianus*) resting on a small island in the center of the river (Figure 1). A day later, this same individual was found dead in a gill net placed in the river, along with 12 exotic cichlid fish (*Tilapia cf. zilli*). The bodies of two of the fish were mutilated, indicating that the cormorant had attempted to feed on them. The collected specimen, an adult male (total length 720 mm; wing span 960 mm; weight 1305 g), was deposited in the Bird Collection of the Facultad de Ciencias, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, at Ensenada (UABC-1321, Figure 2). This individual constitutes the first known specimen of this species for the Baja California Peninsula.

The collection site in this perennial water body is characterized by a series of interconnected ponds (40–60 m wide and a maximum depth of 2 m) with low salinity (<0.1 ppt) and sandy to muddy bottoms (G. Ruiz-Campos unpubl. data). The riparian vegetation here consists of exotic date palms (*Phoenix dactylifera*), reeds (*Phragmites communis*), willows (*Salix* sp.) and mule fat (*Baccharis salicifolia*).

The Neotropic Cormorant, also called the Olivaceous Cormorant, is easily distinguished from the Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) by its smaller



Figure 1. Neotropic Cormorant in the Ojo de Agua at Río La Purísima, Baja California Sur, 7 February 2003.

Photo by Gorgonio Ruiz-Campos

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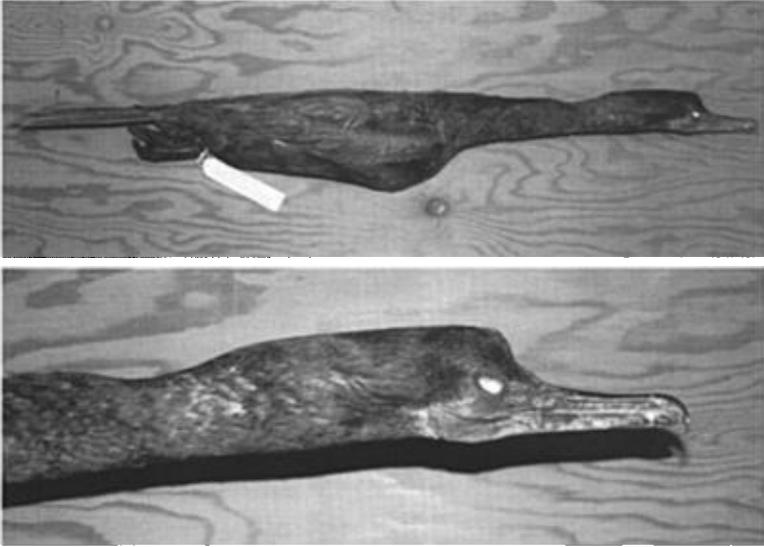


Figure 2. (A) Adult male Neotropic Cormorant collected at Ojo de Agua, Río La Purísima, Baja California Sur, 8 February 2003; (B) head of the same specimen showing the feathered, dark lores.

*Photos by Gorgonio Ruiz-Campos*

size and relatively longer tail, its dark, feathered lores (orange and unfeathered in the Double-crested), and its less extensive gular pouch with a pointed rear margin: in breeding plumage the thin white feathered border of the gular pouch is diagnostic (Sibley 2000). Additionally, the scapular feathers of the Neotropic Cormorant are more pointed than in the Double-crested.

Neotropic Cormorant is resident from southern Sonora, central and eastern Texas, and southeastern Louisiana south throughout most of lowland Mexico, Central America, and South America to Tierra del Fuego: vagrants have also occurred through much of the central and western United States (Kansas, Colorado, Nebraska, South Dakota, Minnesota, Illinois, Arkansas, Nevada; AOU 1998). This species is also resident on certain Caribbean islands, including Great Inagua (Bahamas), Cuba, the Netherlands Antilles, and Trinidad (AOU 1998). It has recently increased markedly in the western United States, now occurring regularly (and probably breeding) in New Mexico and southeastern Arizona. Notably, however, this species has not yet been recorded in Baja California [Norte] in the Colorado Desert region, although there are now 13 records from adjacent California, all of which are from Imperial and Riverside counties, primarily from 7 April to 7 October (California Bird Records Committee data).

Currently, the Neotropic Cormorant is known to be a scarce and very local resident in Baja California Sur. The earliest record there was of 250 at Bahía Magdalena 6–10 March 1982 (Wilbur 1987, Wurster et al. 2001); there have been at least three subsequent reports (involving three to five birds) at that locale 1989–1998 (Wurster et al. 2001). The second peninsular record was of one at San José del Cabo 13 December 1983 (Wurster et al. 2001). Subsequently, the species has been found regularly at San José del Cabo, with seven additional reports 1983–2003 (maximum of 10 on 2

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**Table 1** Recent Additional Records of the Neotropic Cormorant in Baja California Sur

Date	Locality	Number <sup>a</sup>	Source <sup>b</sup>
26 Oct 2001	La Paz (Estero de los Aripes)	2 (ad., imm.)	vt. RAH, RAE
26 Oct 2001	Ojo de Agua east of La Purísima	1 ad.	†FMR et al. (NAB 56:109)
11 Sep 2002	Canal Santo Domingo (Boca de Las Animas)	5 (4 ad., 1 imm.)	EP
29 Jan 2003 57:260)	Chametla	1	vt. SGM, RC (NAB
30 Jan 2003 57:260)	Todos Santos	1	vt. SGM, CB (NAB
10 Feb 2003	Carambuche (La Purísima/San Isidro)	11	†JEP (NAB 57:260)
13 Feb 2003	Todos Santos	1	JEP (NAB 57:260)
15 Feb 2003	Estero San José del Cabo	1	JEP (NAB 57:260)
6 May 2003	El Centenario flats	2	RC, DG

<sup>a</sup>ad., adult; imm., immature.

<sup>b</sup>vt., videotape; †, written description; CB, Casey Beachell; DG, Daniel Galindo; EP, Eduardo Palacios; FMR, Fred M. Roberts; JEP, James E. Pike; RAE, Richard A. Erickson; RAH, Robert A. Hamilton; RC, Roberto Carmona; SGM, Steven G. Mlodinow.

August 1985; Wurster et al. 2001, Table 1). Since 1992 it has been seen regularly in the vicinity of La Paz (Wurster et al. 2001, Table 1), and there are now two records from Todos Santos (Unitt 2001, Table 1). It now appears that the species is regular in the vicinity of La Purísima, where there are three recent reports. The northernmost records are from San Ignacio, where one adult was seen 1 March 1994, and Laguna San Ignacio, where a rectrix was found 9 April 1989 (Erickson et al. 2001). Given that this species has occurred throughout most of Baja California Sur, it should be watched for at additional locations, especially coastal bays and significant inland bodies of fresh water. Breeding on the Baja California peninsula was finally confirmed on 11 September 2002, when Eduardo Palacios observed two active nests with four adults and a juvenile in the northern part of Canal Santo Domingo near the Boca de Las Animas (25° 31.813' N, 112° 5.249' W).

It is still unclear whether the Neotropic Cormorant is a recent colonist of the peninsula or had simply gone undetected prior to 1982; however, the relatively thorough ornithological coverage of the Baja California Peninsula suggests the hypothesis of recent colonization is more likely.

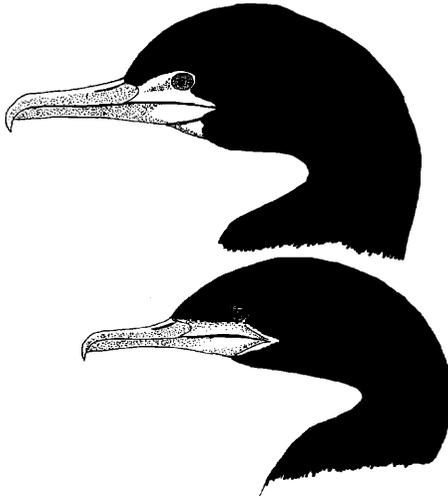
I thank Richard A. Erickson and Eduardo Palacios for providing recent records of the Neotropic Cormorant in Baja California Sur and Marshall Iiff, Ron LeValley, and Richard A. Erickson for their helpful comments that improved significantly the content of this note.

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Heads of the Double-crested Cormorant (top) and the Neotropic Cormorant

*Sketch by George C. West, Birchside Studios*