

068-01-2000

SPECIES Great Cormorant

LOCATION : Walt Rd, Green Lane Reservoir

DATE : November 28, 2000

WEATHER: Overcast, 46⁰ F.

DISTANCE FROM BIRD/ORIENTATION: 250 yards to southwest

OPTICS: 20X Bushnell scope

On November 28 at roughly 1500 hrs, I was making a routine check of the geese at Walt Rd, GLR when I noticed a bird perched some 6 feet above the water in a willow (*Salix* sp.) tree. With the naked eye, I noticed a conspicuous white belly on the bird, and absent-mindedly expected to see a 2 year old Bald Eagle that had been frequenting the site. I viewed the bird through my 20x scope and noted the following.

The bird was obviously a cormorant, based on the body, head, and bill shape. As it was the only cormorant present, direct comparison with others was impossible. As the bird perched facing me, I noticed that the neck and upper breast were heavily streaked with brown. At roughly mid-breast, the brown streaking ended abruptly, creating a near-horizontal border. The lower breast and belly were white or nearly so in color. The bill was light in color, possible light gray, but lighting was something less than optimal. Its bill did, however, appear long and heavy, even at the distance involved. I identified the bird as an immature Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), based largely on the white belly/ brown streaked breast and neck pattern. This pattern is opposite that of the Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*). Though the date alone cannot rule out the latter species, it may be noteworthy that our record late date in Montgomery for Double-crested Cormorant is 26 November. I have previous experience with immature Great Cormorant from GLR May 3 + 1997 (KC, GAF, mobs, PA Birds vol. 11, no. 2), And numerous sightings from Lewes Delaware, Barnegat Light, N.J., and Cape May Point, N.J.

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068-01-2000

Observer: Jeff Hopkins
Date of Sighting: 2 December 2000
Time of sighting: ~12:30-1:00 PM
Weather: Sunny & clear, ~30-35°F, light breeze
Optics: Leica APO Televid Scope on 60x power

The great cormorant was on the opposite shore of the reservoir from the Walt Rd. handicapped fishing pier at the Green pond Reservoir. It was approximately 600 yards to the southwest of the pier. The sun was not directly in my face, but was creating some haze which faded out the sharpness of the image. I was aware that Kevin Crilley had found a great cormorant a few days before, but I was not specifically looking for it. I was simply scanning the far shore looking for ducks, when I chanced on it.

The bird was perched on a bare branch that extended a foot or so out over the water. The perch was approx. 2 ft above the water. Numerous ducks and geese, to which it paid no attention, were swimming back and forth below him. It was perched with its wings at its sides, not outstretched in the "wing-drying" position. It was clearly a cormorant, but struck me as bigger than a double crested. What caught my attention was the two-tone breast and belly. The upper breast was a uniform medium brown color much lighter than the rest of the bird. The belly was pure white or off-white. The two areas were separated by a clean demarcation – the brown did not blend into the white. I had never seen this before on a cormorant, and referred to my field guide (Natl. Geo.) to confirm this was a field mark of a great cormorant. I re-confirmed the two-tone breast was a great cormorant field mark by checking my Sibley when I got home.

Most of the time the bird was facing me (i.e. mostly outward to the lake), so I could not clearly see its bill or the sides of its face. After about 10 minutes it turned its head for a few seconds and I saw the bill. I was struck at how massive and long its bill seemed. I remember thinking it was so big it looked like the bills of frigatebirds which I've seen up-close at a breeding colony. After this quick look it went back to facing outward and a little bit of preening. When it preened I was more focused on trying to see its face so I did not notice any wing details. Finally, it turned its head once more but this time for about a minute. The bill was a uniform pale gray or blue-gray color, and was shaped like a typical cormorant bill. The bill seemed at least as big as the bird's head, if not longer. I did not see any lighter feathers around the bill like on a breeding plumage great cormorant or orange skin around the base of the bill like on a double crested – it's face was uniformly dark (or at least appeared so at the distance).

I have seen a few adult great cormorants before, in both the USA and Western Australia where they're fairly common, although I had never seen a juvenile before. I have seen thousands of double-crested cormorants before, both adults and juveniles. This bird was not a juvenile double crested - they don't have the two-tone breast/belly pattern. The unique breast/belly pattern also rules out potential vagrants, such as neotropic, or even pelagic or Brandt's.

I am sure the bird I saw was a juvenile great cormorant.

Pennsylvania Ornithological Records Committee

Tabulation Form - Round One

Species: Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)

Date of Sighting: 28 November 2000 to 2 December 2000

Location: GREEN LANE RESERVOIR

County: MONTGOMERY

Observer(s): Kevin Crilley, Jeff Hopkins

Date of Submission: 2000

Submitted by: Kevin Crilley, Jeff Hopkins

Written Description: Yes

Photo: No

Specimen: No

Recording: No

Member	Class I	Class II	Class III	Class IV-A				Abstain
					Class IV-B	Class IV-C	Class V	
G. Armistead		X						
D. Couchman		X						
P. Hess		X						
R. Jones J. Stanley		X						
B. Reid		X						
R. Lebering P. Rodewald		X						
M. Sharp								
TOTALS		6						
DECISION		X						

Comments:

Signature (Secretary):



Date:

11/19/01