

RARE SPECIES DOCUMENTATION Records of Vermont Birds

The following form has been prepared to encourage full documentation, when requested, of rare or unseasonal birds in the state of Vermont. These reports are put into a permanent file and should be as detailed as possible. New reports are reviewed annually by the Vermont Bird Records Committee, which evaluates records for their acceptability to future researchers and for inclusion in the state bird list.

Please print or type

SPECIES: Great Cormorant

NUMBER OBSERVED: 1

OBSERVER MAKING REPORT: OTHER OBSERVERS (and addresses if available) Kyle Jones. Reported later in the day by Ed Hack, Michael Foster

LOCATION: (place, township, county) Mill Pond, Windsor, Windsor County, Vermont

DATE: 21-Sep-2016

TIME AND LENGTH OF OBSERVATION: Starting around 9:10 AM, observed for about 20 minutes

DISTANCES FROM BIRD: Maximum_ 1/4 mile_____ Minimum_ 1/4 mile_____

WEATHER:

wind direction _____ wind speed _calm_____

sky cover partly cloudy, fog recently lifted_____ light in relation to observer's position poor lighting-backlit

temperature_____

OPTICAL EQUIPMENT: (make, power, etc.) 8x bins and cheap zoom scope

OBSERVER'S PREVIOUS ACQUAINTANCE WITH THIS SPECIES OR SIMILAR FORMS:

I've probably seen thousands (tens of thousands?) cumulatively. Beginning with Manomet seawatches and seabird and whale surveys, living and birding on the coast of Maine for 8 years and Cape Cod for 9 years. Extensive experience separating them from double-crested cormorants in flight and on land and water during surveys and during other birding.

OTHER DOCUMENTATION: Photo ___X___ Tape Recording _____ Specimen _____

If yes to the above, where is this information deposited?_

eBird checklist <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S31687264>

iNaturalist observation <http://www.inaturalist.org/observations/4172548>

Photos also submitted with this RSD

HABITAT: (be as detailed as possible, include associated bird species)

Shoreline of drawn-down freshwater pond. Nearest other birds were Great Blue Heron, Wood Ducks.

BIRD'S BEHAVIOR: (feeding actions, manner of flight, displays or interactions, reaction to observer)
Chillin.

VOCALIZATION: (song or calls)

None heard.

DESCRIPTION: (Describe what you actually saw during the observation. We hope that observers will take field notes during the observation and before consulting field guides, etc. Additional pages with sketches and copies of field notes are encouraged.)

I was scanning the shoreline to see what was around and saw this cormorant with a pale belly. The bird seemed convincingly bulkier than double-crested cormorants, so I had a strong suspicion this might be an immature great cormorant. I have seen double-crested cormorants with pale bellies bordering on field guide characteristics for great cormorant, so I wasn't convinced. I set up my scope and confirmed that the white belly contrasted sharply with the dark throat, and was also able to clearly make out the white cheek patch when the bird's head was in profile.

Relative size and shape:

Clearly a large bird and clearly a cormorant. The bird also seemed bulkier than a double-crested cormorant, although there was not one nearby for comparison. There was a great blue heron on the shore about 50 yards away from this bird to allow some comparison.

Head (crown, cheeks, eye, throat, nape):

Dark head nape and throat. Cheeks clearly white, although they didn't seem to have the complete white of a full adult great cormorant.

Feet and Bill (shape, color, length):

Bill dark, medium-long. I did not notice the hooked tip.

Upper back:

What I could see was dark, but I did not really get a good view of the back.

Lower back and rump:

Same comments as for back.

Wings (shape, length, markings):

Folded the entire time I saw the bird. What I could see of the folded wing was entirely dark.

Breast, belly, flanks, undertail coverts:

The belly was fairly white from the undertail area up onto the breast. On the breast there was a clear separation of white breast from dark throat. No sign of the white flank patch of adult great cormorants, but there shouldn't be in this plumage anyway.

Tail (shape, length, markings):

Longish (but not Anhinga long) and dark. No other tail markings noted.

IMPORTANT: WHAT SIMILAR SPECIES WERE ELIMINATED WHEN MAKING THIS IDENTIFICATION AND HOW WAS THIS BIRD DIFFERENT?

Anhinga: would be very skinny overall and have a relatively long tail and I would have been a lot more excited about it.

Double-crested Cormorant: Many of the features described above distinguish this bird from double-crested cormorant. White belly is not 100% diagnostic in separating immature cormorants, but it's a good start. The bulkier size and clear white cheek patch confirmed ID as great cormorant for me. Also the stark contrast of the white belly and dark throat. White bellied DCCO typically have a pale throat.

Other cormorants: Unlikely to occur in the Upper Valley, but also eliminated by bulkier stature and white cheek patch.

COMMENTS: (was age or sex determined?, etc.)
Sex unknown, age immature.

This report was written from notes taken during _____ immediately after _____ the observation, or written from memory ___x___ (please attach copies of notes if available)

A few notes were written in the ebird submission the same day:

“Sharply contrasting white belly, bulkier overall than DCCO, white cheek patch was clearly visible in scope, more difficult to see in photos.”

NAME (print)_Kyle Jones_____SIGNATURE (not req'd)_____

MAILING ADDRESS

_lkjones13@gmail.com_____

DATE _23-Sep-2016_____

Return electronically (preferred) to: vbrc@vecostudies.org or mail to: Vermont Bird Records Committee, Vermont Center for Ecostudies, PO Box 420, Norwich, VT 05055





