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Cormorant Is Common Bird



The Brandt cormorant, pictured above, is found along almost all of the coast of California. Its long, hooked beak is handy for fish-catching and

it is a valuable addition to nature's plan, since it eats, to a large extent, the so-called "rough" fish which are not used by humans.

Along The Trail

by
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Along West Cliff drive is a square rock just west of the "Seal rocks." In winter several hundred black birds, standing upright, are seen here. Although their bodies, their flight and their webbed feet are duck-like, these are not ducks. Their correct name is cormorants.

Three species are common in California. Often the double-crested goes inland to breed and can be found nesting on steel towers or in trees near lakes and rivers. Brandt cormorants nest in large colonies on flat offshore islands. Their nests are built mainly of seaweed for which they dive.

Baird cormorants, smallest of the three, nest on ledges in vertical cliffs. The cliffs around Davenport from April to August are decorated with nesting Baird cormorants.

In January I examined with a telescope the cormorants along East Cliff drive and West Cliff drive. The majority of these were Brandt's with a few double-crested among them.

As the breeding season approaches, long white plumes grow from the back and the neck of the Brandt. These can be seen even in January. This species also sports a light blue throat patch, of use in the breeding display. Those few cormorants which we see having bright orange throats are double-crested.

The bill of a cormorant is long, narrow and ends in a hooked beak. This is fish catching apparatus.

When the rocks are not covered by their black bodies, the cormorants are out fishing. In summer the rocks along West Cliff drive are apparently unsuitable for nesting and I presume they go elsewhere.

Those "white-wash" streaks one sees on the pavement near the lighthouse are caused by the excreta of night roosting cormorants which perch in the eucalyptus trees.

Although cormorants eat small fish, much of their food consists of so-called "rough fish" not considered suitable for human consumption. Cormorants doubtless aid the fisheries by keeping check on the predatory fish species which eat the more desirable ones.

Nor is it far fetched to believe that the guano of sea birds fertilizes the ocean shore waters. This promotes the growth of sea plants upon which small marine animals live. It is these small animals such as snails and other vegetarians that constitute a large part of the food of small fish.

Few of us probably think of it but what would a coastal scene be without a bird or a sea lion? Would it not be a lifeless, empty scene? Cormorants are highly ornamental to coast views.

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