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THE OLIVACEOUS CORMORANT IN OKLAHOMA

BY JOHN G. NEWELL AND GEORGE M. SUTTON

The Olivaceous Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax olivaceus*) breeds so widely in Mexico, Central America, and South America that it is sometimes called the Neotropic Cormorant. It has, according to Sutton's summary of records, been



OLIVACEOUS CORMORANT

Adult male in heavy molt shot by Jack S. Roberts at a playa pond in Canadian County, Oklahoma on 10 August 1975 and sketched the same day by George Miksch Sutton.

seen so frequently in Oklahoma in recent years as to justify prediction that it will presently be found nesting here. Presumably what it needs as breeding habitat is standing water of sufficient depth to provide a summer-long supply of the fish, frogs, and other aquatic animals on which it feeds — plus fairly high trees either living or dead in which to build its nests above, or very close to, water.

Phalacrocorax olivaceus was first observed in Oklahoma on Lake Texoma, the big impoundment of the Red River along the state's southern border, in 1950. On 18 August of that year Kenneth J. Starks collected one of two birds that were perched on a stub in the lake about 2½ miles south of Willis, Marshall County. His specimen (UOMZ 365) was an adult female in somewhat worn nuptial feather (the white bordering the gular pouch was reduced to mere flecking, but that of the auricular plumes formed a fairly noticeable patch); it had been identified as a Double-crested Cormorant (*P. auritus*), but was much too small for that species. Cormorants that had been seen "almost daily" that summer near Willis may not all have been Olivaceous Cormorants (Starks, 1951, Wilson Bull. 63: 333-34).

No one reported seeing a "small" cormorant in Oklahoma in 1951 or 1952, but in 1953 two specimens of *P. olivaceus* were taken near Willis, an adult male (UOMZ 919) on 14 July (Bryan P. Glass), and a subadult male (UOMZ 949) on 15 July (Carl D. Riggs). The adult male's gular sac was bordered with white and silky white plumes adorned the sides of the head.

No one reported seeing the species in 1954.

In 1955 a farmer found an immature bird alive on 6 April in a sludge-pit near Stillwater, Payne County, north-central Oklahoma (1955, Audubon Field Notes 9: 340). The bird died on 8 April and was preserved as a specimen (UOMZ 1966). On 25 April of that year, Sutton and V. E. Dowell had a close look from a boat at an immature bird perched on a stub in Lake Texoma near Willis; on 17 May, C. D. Riggs collected an immature male (UOMZ 2162) in the same area; on 9 September, G. Bryan Harry saw an immature bird along the Lake Texoma shore in the Tishomingo National Wildlife Refuge in Johnston County; and on 30 and 31 October, C. D. Riggs saw two "small cormorants" flying with some Double-crested Cormorants near Willis.

In 1956 the species was first seen on 5 April (two birds near Willis, C. D. Riggs). On 20 April, Sutton collected a molting immature female (UOMZ 2404) at Canton Reservoir in Blaine County, central Oklahoma; on 4 May, C. E. Cozort collected another molting immature female (UOMZ 2576) at Reagan, Johnston County; and on 27 May, Sutton, V. A. Travis, Jr., D. H. Baepler, and C. A. Ely saw several birds, some of them black-looking rather than brown, along the Texas shore of Lake Texoma directly south of Willis. No late summer or fall sightings were reported that year.

On 20 July 1957, Sutton saw a compact flock of six birds — possibly a family group — and a separate bird not far from shore on Lake Texoma near Willis. The six birds were, so far as known, the first flock of Olivaceous Cor-

morants to be seen in the state. Sutton could not see them clearly enough to be sure that there were two black adults and four brown young birds in the flock.

No one reported seeing the species from 1958 through 1962. The two records for 1963 were fall sight records — of a single bird at Lake Purcell, McClain County, central Oklahoma, on 25 September (Mary A. Johns, Grace E. Ray) and of a single bird along the west shore of Lake Hefner in Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma, on 5 October (W. M. Davis, John Farrand, Grace E. Ray).

P. olivaceus was unreported in Oklahoma from 1964 through 1969.

In 1970, the species was first recorded on 2 May — a single bird seen by R. B. Payne in Woods County (exact locality uncertain) in the northwestern part of the main body of the state (1970, Audubon Field Notes 24:620). From 9 May to 31 October, Newell, W. D. Harden, J. S. Shackford, *et al.* saw the species repeatedly in the Oklahoma City area, two birds on 9 May at Lake Overholser, the rest at Lake Hefner (1971, Amer. Birds 25: 75). According to Newell's detailed notes, eight birds that frequented Lake Hefner from 26 July to the end of August were "several times seen standing in a row at the water's edge. Often they rested on shore along with Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*), which appeared to be of the same body diameter. Although they differed somewhat (*inter se*) in color, several being very light below and two . . . largely black below, all appeared to be immature." Newell saw nine birds on 1 September. From that date on, the population decreased: Newell saw eight birds on 6 September, six on 9, 10, and 12 September, four to seven from 13 to 24 September, six on 4 October, two on 11 October, one (only) on 25 and 31 October. Throughout the summer and fall that year, the weather was warm to hot; no severe cold front in late October sent the little Lake Hefner population south. Meanwhile, on 4 October, at Boomer Lake near Stillwater, John Grula saw one bird that probably was fully adult, for "the white around the bill was very clear and there was an orange throat-patch" (see note from Grula to the late Zella Moorman). This bird was reported, though not seen, by Newell (1971, Amer. Birds 25: 75).

In 1971, the species was recorded only at Lake Overholser, only in spring, and only by Newell, who saw a single bird on 9 April, two birds "with eight larger cormorants" on 7 May, one bird on 8 May, and one bird on 12 May — this an "all black" individual with four "whitish-breasted" Double-crested Cormorants.

The only two sightings in 1972 were Newell's — of a "black bird with beginning of white outline to pouch" on 27 February "low on stump" in the middle of the exit canal between the "settling basin" and Lake Overholser, and of a bird at Lake Overholser on 19 March. There is no record of any sort for 1973. The only records for 1974 were for Hulah Reservoir, Osage County, northeastern Oklahoma, where Elizabeth C. Hicks saw one bird on 10 August, two birds on 22 September, one bird on 13 October, and two birds on 19 October.

In 1975, the species appeared in four widely separated areas — at Lake Hefner, where Jack S. Roberts photographed a single bird on 30 April; at Hulah Reservoir, where Elizabeth Hicks saw one bird on 3 May, three birds on 3 September, and one bird, with a Double-crested Cormorant, on 4 October; at Lake Humphreys, in Stephens County, south-central Oklahoma, where J. Craythorne, his wife Moryne, and Vida Buckholz saw three birds on 17 June; and at Rose Lake, near Yukon, Canadian County, central Oklahoma, where several birds were seen between 6 July and 23 August (1976, Amer. Birds 30: 91). This "Rose Lake," actually a playa, had been bone-dry in 1974, but in 1975 overflow of the North Canadian River created a several-acre shallow pond that supported a lush growth of cattails, knotweed (*Polygonum* sp.), and other aquatic vegetation (W. D. Harden, J. S. Shackford, J. S. Roberts, H. Walter, Newell, Sutton, *et al.*). The Rose Lake population was in heavy molt. Nine birds seen there on 2 August were all "rather brown" (W. D. Harden). On 10 August Jack S. Roberts collected a fully adult male (UOMZ 8625) much of whose head, neck, and body plumage was sheathed at the base. The head of this individual Sutton drew in watercolor only a few hours after the bird's death; its eyes were blue of a pale, slightly greenish shade (see colorplate). Birds watched from time to time found food not in deep water among the cattails but in very shallow water where the stand of knotweed was dense.

A quotation from Newell's notes on Olivaceous Cormorants that he observed at Lake Hefner and at Rose Lake in 1975 is in order here: "Fairly heavy human activity does not appear to disturb them. I watched feeding birds at Lake Hefner at less than 50 yards distance. The birds at times fed under water in the heavy aquatic growth so near shore their backs were half out of water. They must have been pushing themselves along bottom to get through the growth. At Rose Lake birds would fly in and alight on wires over our heads at distances less than 100 feet, although they were fully aware of our presence. It was an amusing sight with several heavy birds trying to regain their balance with webbed feet on a slender wire. The accompanying waving of heads and chorus of piglike grunts was more reptilian than avian."

In 1976, several observers watched the Rose Lake population from 10 April (when Newell, his wife Dorothy, and Deloris Isted saw one bird) to 3 July, when Newell saw three. No one saw more than five birds at any one time. By 11 July the pond was "drying up very rapidly." From 4 July on, however, Newell continued to see small cormorants near Oklahoma City — a single bird at Lake Hefner, 17 July; a bird "in heavy molt" along the North Canadian River, 18 July; and four birds, not far apart, in the settling basin just north of Lake Overholser, 8 August.

The only records for 1977 were all for the Oklahoma City area. Rose Lake was dry; indeed, part of that playa was now under cultivation. On 16 August, D. Scott Wood saw one bird at Lake Hefner; at the same lake, on 15 September, he collected one bird (molting immature female, UOMZ 12000) of the six that he and J. A. Grzybowski saw. On 29 September, Wood and Grzybowski saw an

adult "in high plumage" at Lake Overholser.

No one reported seeing the species in 1978. In 1979, James C. Hoffman saw one bird (compared directly with a Double-crested Cormorant) on Lake Yahola in Mohawk Park in the northern part of Tulsa, Tulsa County, north-eastern Oklahoma.

In 1980, John A. Kirk, Ronald S. Sullivan, and Philip C. Clover saw one bird on 8 September on the Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge in Alfalfa County, north-central Oklahoma. It was perched "on a snag near the shore of the (main) lake, near the old river mouth" (see letter of 18 October 1980 from Kirk to Sutton).

The data given above make clear that from 1950 through 1981 there was no resident (non-migratory) population of Olivaceous Cormorants in Oklahoma. Presumably the one bird that Newell saw in Oklahoma City on 27 February 1972 had just returned from its winter home. To be noted is the fact that no obviously paired twosome of adult birds has been reported from the state; nor has anyone observed courtship display, allopreening, carrying of nest material, or copulation. So many birds seen and collected in spring and early summer have been brown (i.e., immature), and so many in late summer and fall "in high plumage", that we wonder whether assumption of the decorative plumes of the head and neck, courtship display, and pairing may not take place in fall and winter rather than spring.

The species is to be watched closely. For several years running a few pairs are known to have bred with a colony of Great Blue Herons (*Ardea herodias*) at Arrowhead Lake, an impoundment of Big Sandy Creek in Clay County, Texas, only about 20 miles south of Jefferson County, southwestern Oklahoma. On 22 May 1974, John Kibler, his wife Erma, and Nancy Moore saw three Olivaceous Cormorants there, each on a nest in drowned woods. A photograph of one of the adults appeared in 1975 (*Amer. Birds* 29: 1000). As the dead trees rotted and fell the herons and cormorants were obliged to move. The mixed colony is believed to breed now at the impoundment's southernmost end — at a spot that is difficult to get to for the water is shallow and there are no roads leading or passing close to it (see letter of 9 June 1981 from Nancy Moore to J. D. Tyler).

8304 LAKEAIRE DR., OKLAHOMA CITY 73132; 818 W. BROOKS ST., NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069, 15 JUNE 1981.

SECOND SUCCESSFUL NESTING OF BALD EAGLE IN OKLAHOMA

BY LOYD D. ISLEY

In the summer of 1978, on the Robert S. Kerr Reservoir in far eastern Oklahoma, the Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) nested successfully for the first time in the state's history. The pair raised a single young one, which fledged in mid-July (Isley, 1979, *Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc.* 12: 1-4). On 28 May 1981 I obtained proof that Bald Eagles had nested successfully for the second time. On that date I saw an almost fledged young one perched on the side of the

very nest that had been used in 1978. A review of observations is in order.

On 14 July 1978 we last saw the young eagle that was reared that year. It was perched in a tree about 100 yards from the nest-tree. In a third tree, also about 100 yards from the nest-tree, perched one of the parent eagles.

In 1979 a pair of adult eagles stayed around the nest-tree for a while after the rest of the wintering population had left for the north, but they did not, so far as we could tell, add sticks to the nest or show any special interest in it.

In the spring of 1980 a pair of adult eagles lingered around the nest-tree for 30 to 45 days after the rest of the wintering population had left. During that period one or both birds went to the nest-tree repeatedly. One of them sometimes sat in the nest as if incubating or brooding, but we decided not to climb to the nest lest we cause the birds to desert. By about the end of May both eagles had left the area.

Early in the spring of 1981 we noticed that two adult eagles were showing much interest in the old nest. On 23 March, Debra Christie, Park Technician, reported that she had seen one adult eagle perched in a tree near the nest-tree and (through her binocular) another "adult eagle's head sticking up out of the nest." Once again our hopes for another eaglet soared.

On 26 March, 31 March, and 3 April, Debra and I observed an adult eagle *in* the nest. Since the bird sat there for some time on each date we felt certain that at least one egg or chick was in the nest. On 16 April, while Debra was



BALD EAGLE NEST AT KERR RESERVOIR

From left: Adult and eaglet, 29 May 1981; Eaglet in nest, 1 June 1981; Pole and platform erected after nest-tree was blown down in early July, 1981. Photographs by Loyd D. Isley and Robert Burnett.

watching one eagle that was in the nest, she saw the other fly from a floating log to the nest. From her position she could not tell what happened at the nest but she believed that food had been taken to it. On 21 and 30 April, she observed both adult eagles, one perched on the nest, the other in a tree close to the nest-tree.

During May, all hands were so busy with various other projects that no one had time for watching the eagles. On 28 May, however, I received a most pleasant surprise: I saw an almost fledged eaglet in the nest!

Next day (29 May) ranger Robert Burnett and I went in a flat-bottomed motorboat to within about 100 yards of the nest and took pictures with a 200-millimeter lens. One adult eagle that flew around us several times, in what appeared to be an effort to lure or drive us away from the nest and its young, opened and closed its mouth repeatedly, making a rough, growling cluck that was inaudible more than 40 yards away.

On 1 June, Burnett and I returned to the nest-tree by motorboat, this time equipped with a 500-millimeter lens on our Canon 35-millimeter camera. We got very good closeups of a parent eagle sitting on a limb above the nest while the young one sat on the edge of the nest. After the parent finally flew to a tree about 200 yards east of the nest, we cautiously circled the nest-tree at about 30 yards and took closeup shots of the youngster on the edge of the nest. It turned its head to watch us but did not appear to be frightened at all.

On 9 June, Harry Smith and I returned to the nest and took more pictures. The wind, gusting to about 25 miles per hour, made for some interesting shots of the old bird attempting to alight.

On 13 June, one of our secretaries, Virginia Tobey, observed an adult eagle sitting in a large tree west of the nest-tree and the eaglet in a tree east of the nest-tree. We now knew that the eaglet was flying. I checked again on 16 and 19 June, on each date seeing the eaglet in a tree well away from the nest.

In late June or early July (date uncertain), wind blew the nest and nest-tree down. We set to work immediately putting up a pole and platform for the eagles, hoping that they would accept it and proceed with another nesting.

STAR ROUTE 4, BOX 182, SALLISAW, OKLAHOMA 74955, 27 JULY 1981.

GENERAL NOTES

Possible Garganey Teal in Roger Mills County, Oklahoma. — On the morning of 2 May 1979 an unfamiliar small duck was on the lake near the house on our ranch near Durham, Roger Mills County, west-central Oklahoma. It was by itself about 200 yards from the front porch. Viewed through a 20X spotting scope, its chief features were a white line running from just above the eye to the back of the head, a pronounced dark bar or two on the flanks, and narrow, pure white stripes above the wing. I inspected it several times, being more puzzled each time I looked. The weather was bad (air chilly; some rain; stiff wind from north), but the light was good.

I called Thelma Fox, in Amarillo, Texas, asking her to come to see the bird and to bring some books that had colored illustrations. She and her sister,

Marguerite Hollar, came that afternoon. When they arrived the strange duck was not on the lake. At about 1630, however, it returned, this time with a flock of about 40 Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*), five American Wigeons (*A. americana*), and two Northern Shovelers (*A. clypeata*). We all watched it for about 45 minutes, saw it well, compared it with the figures in the colorplates, and decided that it could be nothing but an adult drake Garganey Teal (*A. querquedula*), an Old World species that had never been seen in Oklahoma and only rarely reported from anywhere in North America.

We did not, admittedly, know anything about aberrant drake Blue-winged Teal, some of which may resemble the drake Garganey in certain ways (see head drawings by Robert M. Mengel in Palmer (Ed., 1976, Handbook of North American birds, Vol. 2, Part 1, p. 464, Yale Univ. Press, New Haven and London). — Rena Ross, 2805 Travis St., Amarillo, Texas 79109, 15 May 1980.

Goldfinches and waxwing drinking maple sap.—On a mild, warm Sunday in mid-January 1981 (exact date not recorded) the possibility of netting and banding some American Goldfinches (*Carduelis tristis*) in our yard in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma appealed to me, so I went out to see if the branches of a maple tree would allow a mist net to be hung there without too much trouble. Having decided to give the operation a try, I pruned away two branches, each about half an inch in diameter. I applied no pruning paint to the wounds and sap immediately began to drip from them.

While watching through a window a short time later, I saw a goldfinch alight on one of the freshly cut branches. At once it began drinking the sap. Presently another goldfinch arrived, drove the first one away, and started drinking. A birdbath under the maple, and only a few feet away, was filled with fresh water. For some reason the sap was obviously more to the little birds' liking than the water.

About three weeks later, I saw a Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) drinking sap at the same branch.—Patricia L. Muzny, 1209 Southwest 47th St., Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73109, 5 March 1981.

Exceptionally low American Robin's nest.—On the afternoon of 10 April 1981, my Natural History students and I discovered the nest of an American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) in a bushy 7-foot eastern red cedar (*Juniperus americana*) in open woods bordering Wolf Creek in Lawton, Comanche County, southwestern Oklahoma. The nest contained three small chicks whose eyes were still closed. We neither saw nor heard a parent robin nearby. The nest measured about 4½ inches (11.5 centimeters) from top to bottom; its rim was 2 feet 8½ inches (82.5 centimeters) from the ground. When I returned to it and photographed it on 21 April it was empty. Bent (1949, Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus. 196: 55) states that American Robins have been known to nest "anywhere from on the ground up to 75 feet in a tree . . ." For Oklahoma, the lowest nest on record apparently was 3 feet up (Nice, 1931, The birds of Oklahoma, p. 142). — Jack D. Tyler, Department of Biology, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma 73505, 1 May 1981.