

IDENTIFYING CORMORANTS IN COASTAL BRITISH COLUMBIA

Three species of cormorants are found in BC year-round. Predominantly black birds, they have a distinctive hooked, laterally compressed bill, noticeably stiff tail feathers and naked, coloured skin on the throat. On land, they often adopt a distinctive posture standing upright with wings outstretched to dry their feathers.

Double-crested Cormorant (DCCO)

- BC's largest cormorant
- Found in both freshwater and saltwater habitats
- Face is yellow/orange in all ages/plumages
- Adults are all black
- Juveniles have pale gray/beige breast and throat
- In flight, note thick neck and bulky build

Double-crested Cormorant adults (top) Juvenile DCCO (bottom left) (Photos: Ralph Hocken)



Pelagic Cormorant (PECO)

- Smallest of three BC cormorant species
- Note thin neck and beak
- Relatively long-tailed, noticeable when perched
- Adults have distinctive white patch on rear-flanks
- Adults are a glossy blackish-green overall with deep-red lores
- Juveniles are all dark brownish-black; note structure
- In late winter/spring, adults are brighter red around the face and have thin white plumes on the neck

Pelagic Cormorant face and profile showing long tail (above by Mike Yip) Adult swimming showing white patch (below by Ralph Hocken)



Brandt's Cormorant (BRCO)

- Adults are greenish-black like PECO but note thicker neck/bill
- Relatively shorter-tailed than PECO
- Note beige-coloured throat-patch, present at all ages
- Juveniles have tan-coloured breast; compare bill colour to DCCO
- More gregarious than PECO
- In spring/early summer, adults have wispy white plumes on their head and blue skin at the base of the bill

Brandt's Cormorant in flight (above left by Guy Monty) Adult with wispy white plumes (above right by Mike Yip) Adult in breeding plumage swimming (below by Guy Monty)



Adapted October 2020 from Birds Canada publication prepared by Russell Cannings, June 2013.

