

Neotropic Cormorant

4 May 1998

Otter Creek M., Tama Co., IA

*Mark Proescholdt

IBL 68:90

Record Number: 98-11

Classification: NA

DOCUMENTATION

Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb 50148 [11/27/98]

REFERENCES

Field Reports: IBL 68:90

Records Committee: IBL 69:90

VOTE: 5 A-D, 2 NA

NA, I am reluctant to accept a record of this species based primarily on size with no other birds present for comparison. The exact shape and extent of the throat pouch and the relative length of the tail to the body are details that would help substantiate the record.

A-D, Even though view was est 120-180 yards with binoculars the small size, long tail, thin bill should separate from D. C. Cormorant.

A-D, Reluctantly. A couple of things bother me about this report. Although Neotropic is certainly smaller than Double-crested, the size is terribly understated here by comparing it to a Great-tailed Grackle or Red-necked Grebe. I can only surmise that it is an artifact of not being terribly familiar with the comparisons and relating to D-C. To a certain extent, I feel like I'm going on faith that it was indeed a cormorant, but sitting on a small stick and diving make this seem likely. Some of the details are pretty fuzzy and it is too bad scope views were not attainable to get more detail on the facial pattern and bill structure. The paler bill, however, eliminates other small (and more likely) cormorants with the possible exception of Alaskan Red-faced. Long tail is good for Neotropic, and combined with lack of white in the plumage, is probably sufficient for ID.

A-D, small size, long tail, dark throat, second observer all indicate Neotropic.

NA, The only field mark of note is the size. No white border to the throat pouch was seen. I don't think tail length can be judged except in flight when it can be compared to head-neck length. I spent several hours looking for this bird. I did see a small dark, small-headed cormorant take off, and I suspected it would be the bird; however, as it flew higher and higher and was joined by an immature cormorant, it appeared to be the same size as the other cormorant and the head-neck was definitely but not a lot longer than the tail, and slight crooked neck was evident. Cormorants vary in size and can be very difficult to identified--I would like to have strong and more objective criteria for a Neotropic Cormorant in Iowa.

A-D, While I would like a better description of pouch area at

base of bill, observer is experienced and other information strongly suggests correct ID.

RE-VOTE (by mail): 5 NA, 2 A-D

NA, The NA voters make a good case. I should have drawn from my own recent experience when reviewing this identification which was based primarily on size. Even though I have recently seen both Double-crested and Neotropic in the same area, it has never been immediately obvious, based upon size, which was which. Perhaps with practice one could, and Harrison (Seabirds) indicates there is no overlap in size, but the observer does not have this experience. I concluded from the doc. that there were no other birds nearby for actual comparison, although another cormorant flew over later. With the size in question, the balance of the id falls apart due to subjectivity: bill color and comparative length of tail.

NA, In my opinion the bird was not seen or described well enough to substantiate a record of this species in Iowa. The identification was based primarily on size, and the tail was described as long, but both of these characteristics are very difficult to judge on a solitary bird at a long distance without anything nearby for comparison.

A-D, I disagree that the only field mark of note was size. No color noted in the gular area, observed at a distance through binoculars, indicates Neotropic rather than Double-crested. Zimmer, in "The Western Bird Watcher" states: "Because it covers a large area and is either bright orange or yellow in color, the gular pouch of the Double-crested is usually obvious at even great distances. The Olivaceous, on the other hand, has a much smaller gular pouch that angles posteriorly from the eye and then cuts back sharply toward the c[h]in. It ranges in color from dull pink-orange to a dull yellow. The combination of dull color with small size makes the gular pouch of the Olivaceous somewhat inconspicuous, especially at longer distances."

NA, Hank Zaletel related using an Am. Crow on the nearby shoreline for size comparison. He stated that the bodies of the two birds seemed the same size. However, given the same view of the bird on the snag (100 yds est.) and only binoculars on hand, he was not confident of the ID without facial features. With the difficulties involved with distance, and lack of direct comparison with other corms., there isn't enough detail to confirm this lone bird.

NA, I have nothing to add to my previous comments. Rare birds require more proof than just size. Other members were reluctant, not firmly positive.

NA, NA voters convinced me to change my vote. The circumstances of the observation raise significant doubt about ability to accurately judge size and tail length, the features used for ID.

What species? Neotropic Cormorant How many? 1Location? Otter Creek Marsh - Tama CountyType of habitat? Big pond areaWhen? date(s): May 4, 1998 time: 12:45 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.Who? your name and address: Mark Proescholdt, Box 65, Liscomb, Iowa 50148others with you: noneothers before or after you: Hank Zaletel saw it that afternoon after me

Describe the bird(s) including only what you observed. Include size, shape, details of all parts (bill, eye, head, neck, back, wing, tail, throat, breast, belly, under tail, legs, feet). Also mention voice and behavior.

I spotted this bird perched on a small stick just out of the water in the big pond area west of the red barn. It was a very small cormorant. I checked it often to make sure it was a cormorant and not something else since it was so small. There were no other birds in this pond. It seemed about $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of a Double-Crested Cormorant. I thought it seemed about the length of a male Great-tailed Grackle. It had a flesh-colored bill that was a thin bill. Possibly the bill color was a little yellowish. It had a dark brown head and neck that merged into the blackish color of the body and tail. It had a long-tail look. It was all dark around the throat and no color around the throat patch area was seen. It had no white on its plumage. At the end, it went into the water and

Similar species and how eliminated: D-cr. Cormorant is much larger. I saw one fly as I drove out and it looked huge in flight.

Swam and dove. It seemed a smaller size than that of a Red-necked Grebe and the bird just about disappeared with just a thin neck and head showing. went to make phone calls.

Did any one disagree or have reservations about identification? NoIf yes, explain: Hank thought that it was a Neotropic Cormorant. I don't know if anyone else saw this bird.

Viewing conditions: give lighting, distance (how measured), and optical equipment:

Sunny day, sun behind me. 180 yards from parking lot, 120 yards from road estimated, 8X30 Nikon binocs. (Mom and I did not see it at 7:00 p.m. on May 4th.)

Previous experience with species and similar ones:

Saw one in Texas long ago. Have seen lots of D-cr. Cormorants.

References and persons consulted before writing description:

None really

How long before field notes made? made right away this form completed? May 27, 1998