



Oregon Sea Grant Extension  
Sustainable Tourism &  
Outdoor Recreation Program

# Interpretative Fact Sheet

## Brandt's Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*)



The following short article is from the [Oregon Coast 101 Species](#) collection used by the Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional (GORP) training program. These articles are intended to provide interesting facts you can share with your clientele and add value to your services.

An Interpretive Fact Sheet has been written about each species. We are currently uploading these blogs and creating the links.

**Come visit us!**

Tourism and Business Development College of Business,  
Oregon State University Extension - Oregon Sea Grant at  
<http://tourism.oregonstate.edu/>

Guide and Outfitter Recognized Professional Program  
<https://www.GORPguide.org>

For more information about the GORP training program see:  
<https://www.gorpguide.org/become-a-gorp-certified-guide>

# Brandt's Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax penicillatus*)

---

 [tourism.oregonstate.edu/brandts-cormorant-phalacrocorax-penicillatus/](https://tourism.oregonstate.edu/brandts-cormorant-phalacrocorax-penicillatus/)

By colliek2

August 28, 2020

There are three different types of cormorants on the Oregon coast. Brandt's Cormorants reside year around and are easily recognizable during breeding season by its unique throat patch.



Photo Courtesy of ODFW

## How it got is name

---

German zoologist Johann Friedrich von Brandt identified and named the species in 1838 while working at the Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, Russia. His species description was based on a specimen taken by Russians exploring the Pacific Coast at the time.

Territory for the cormorant extends from Alaska south through Mexico along the Baja peninsula. Year around residency is predominately in the U.S. along marine coastlines and estuaries near the ocean.

Favorite haunts include Washington, Oregon, and California which offer rich food sources associated with California water currents. Populations redistribute along the coast then the effect of this current diminish as this resource dissipates.

## Recognizing them

---

In the breeding season males display an intensely blue gular pouch. They attract mates by pointing their bill skyward and prominently displaying their pouch.

They also have wispy white plumes along the side of their head and on their back, which show well against the solid black of the rest of their plumage. In bright light, their feathers have a green iridescence. During all seasons Brandt's Cormorants have buff-colored feathers that outline the gular region. The other two Oregon species do not.

All Cormorants are fish-eating water birds and have four toes joined by webbing.

## **Where to find them**

---

Always near the water, cormorants rarely fly over land. Nest building activities are one of the few reasons they ever come to shore.

Nests are typically built in colonies on windward slopes of rocky islands, steep cliffs, and sandy beaches. Brandt's Cormorant tend to live together in large flocks, particularly in California and Oregon.

Nesting territories reflect this high population behavior and are quite tiny. Male Cormorants arrive at the nesting areas before females to claim their space or existing nest. They vigorously defend their nesting area and begin nest construction or refreshing,

The circular nests are typically around 14 inches wide and just over six inches tall. They contain grass, moss, weeds, sticks and driftwood, feathers, and marine algae.

## **Let's Go Fishing**

---

Brandt's Cormorant are strong divers and excellent swimmers. Unlike other cormorant species, they do not spend a lot of time drying their wings. They do like to fish together.

They even forage schools of fish together in groups that includes other seabirds, and sealions. The group appears to work together feeding in concert. As some birds rapidly surface, others are flying to the leading edge of the flock.

Cormorants dive beside or below a school of fish and drive them to the surface. Remarkably Cormorants are able to dive up to 230 feet. During the chase, they grasp prey in their bills, crush it, and swallow it headfirst.

## **What's on the menu?**

---

Brandt's Cormorant will eat at least 93 fish species such as anchovy, perch, herring, seabass, and other animals such as squid.

## **Population Declines**

---

Even with superior swimming and fishing, the Brandt's Cormorant populations appear to be in decline. Human activities such as spills and pollution threaten all seabirds and their prey species.

Brandt's Cormorants may be more sensitive to the impacts than other birds because they only forage in waters where spills often occur or concentrate. Human (and dog) disturbances can cause birds to abandon a colony or leave a population vulnerable to predation.

#### REFERENCES:

–All About Birds, Brandt's Cormorant

([https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brandts\\_Cormorant/overview](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Brandts_Cormorant/overview) and life history pages)

–Oregon Dept. of Fish and Wildlife, Pelicans and Cormorants

(<https://myodfw.com/wildlife-viewing/species/pelicans-and-cormorants>)