

## DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT ATTEMPTING TO EAT A BIRD

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The Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) is a common inhabitant of most water bodies in Florida (Hatch and Weseloh 1999). Cormorants are primarily piscivorous (Nettleship and Duffy 1995). While most studies have examined the impact of cormorant predation on fish, other prey items noted include crayfish and salamanders (Derby and Lovvorn 1997), crustaceans (Cairns 1998), and insects (O'Meara et al. 1982). I have found no mention of cormorants consuming birds.

About mid-day on 17 December 2001, while boating on the Crystal River, Citrus County, Florida, I observed a Double-crested Cormorant trying to swallow a bird. The day was sunny, with few clouds and only a slight breeze. The cormorant was east of Buzard Island at approximately 28°33' 29"N and 82°35' 54"W. When first observed, the cormorant was about 30 m from the boat. Without binoculars it was easy to see that the cormorant was trying to swallow a bird. Through binoculars the prey bird's head appeared to be in the cormorant's gullet, its wings were extended with the bases at the juncture of the cormorant's upper and lower bill. The body was about as long as the cormorant's bill, the tail was "average" in length, and the legs were of moderate length and light in color. The back and top of the tail appeared to be a pearlescent gray, as were the upper wing surfaces. The lower body surfaces were white. The feathers appeared fresh; they did not appear to be waterlogged, suggesting the bird was recently dead. Other observers in the boat, without the aid of binoculars, could see that the cormorant was trying to swallow the bird. The cormorant was not seen to successfully swallow it.

The bird appeared to be some sort of shorebird and most closely resembled a phalarope (*Phalaropus* spp.), Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), or small plover (*Charadrius* spp.) but none fits the description well, and any of these species would have been outside of normal distribution areas. I did not observe how the cormorant came into possession of the bird, whether by capture of a free-ranging individual or consumption of a dead or incapacitated bird.

### LITERATURE CITED

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