

Anhinga

Classification:

Anhinga anhinga

Common names:

American anhinga,
American darter,
black darter, snake
bird

Habitat and

Distribution:

Roosts in trees and bushes in freshwater swamps, marshes, lakes, slow moving streams, sloughs, canals and brackish lagoons, bays and tidal streams near the coasts. Anhingas can be found from the southeastern U.S. to Argentina.

Description:

Size: 28-36 inches tall with 45-48 inch wingspan, weighing about 3 lb.

Color: Black with silvery white wing patches and spots with overall green iridescence. Females have pale head, neck and breast colors, juveniles are brownish.

Shape: Small, snake-like head and neck, pointed bill, and long-fan-like tail.

Reproduction:

Male soars and marks potential nest site with twigs for courtship. Nest in small communities, often with herons or egrets. May build their own nests or use nests built by herons and egrets. Nests built with leaves and sticks and are lined with mosses and leaves. Nests will be located 4-20 feet above the water or land. Nesting occurs mostly from March through May in the Southeastern U.S. Females lay an average of 4 eggs, which hatch 26-29 days later.



Double-crested Cormorant

Classification:

Phalacrocorax auritus

Common names:

Double-crested cormorant, Sea crow, water turkey, water buzzard, crow-duck, Farallon cormorant, shag, Taunton turkey, white-crested cormorant

Habitat and Distribution:

Found along lakes, rivers, swamps, and coastal areas throughout North America (esp. East and Gulf coasts and in Great Lakes regions). Other species found worldwide. Migrates to warmer areas in the winter.

Description:

Size: About 26-28 inches long with a 50 inch wingspan.

Color: Adults are brownish-black with black legs and feet. Yellow-orange throat and upper face. Young may be pale underneath.

Shape: Long thin neck and long bill, which is hooked at the tip. Tail is very short and stiff. Feet are webbed.

Reproduction:

Courtship involves splashing, swimming in zig zags, diving for vegetation to drop near the female. Cormorants generally nest in large colonies. Nests are built with sticks, twigs and drift material on the ground or in trees close to the water. Usually lay 3-4 eggs which are bluish white in color. Male and female share the work from nest building to chick feeding. Chicks can live on their own after 10 weeks.



Anhinga

Feeding:

Anhingas dive for prey, mostly fish but may eat insects, crayfish, snakes, frog eggs, etc. Spears fish with pointed beak, then brings catch to surface and jerks the fish off its bill - swallows fish head first.

How to distinguish from a cormorant:

- "A"nhinga - "A" is a pointed letter and the anhinga has a pointed beak,
- "A"lternating flight pattern - both soars and flies,
- Anhingas lack a yellow color near the bill,
- Anhingas have white spots on the wings, and
- Anhingas have longer tails and necks.

Interesting Facts:

- Swims with only its head above the water.
- Unlike most birds, does not produce oil to waterproof its feathers - which allows the bird to dive deep for prey but requires the bird to spread its wings to dry out after diving.
- The word anhinga means 'water turkey' - a name given because of the bird's long tail.
- Mating pairs are monogamous.
- Anhingas have been seen performing rituals when changing egg incubation duties - they intertwine necks and pass nesting material when changing positions.
- Males will defend their territory by pecking at each others head and neck.
- Young chicks still dependent on their parents will temporarily drop into water and swim away when danger is sensed.

Additional Reading:

museum.nhm.uga.edu/gawildlife/gaww.html
www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov

Double-crested Cormorant

Feeding:

Cormorants may hunt and fish alone or with flocks of several hundred birds. They dive up to 60 feet and can stay underwater for more than a minute, swimming using webbed feet. They eat mostly fish and invertebrates like crayfish.

How to distinguish from and anhinga:

- "C"ormorant - "C" is a curved letter and the cormorant has a curved bill,
- "C"ontinuous flight pattern - cannot soar,
- Shorter tail than anhinga,
- Stronger swimmer, and
- More likely to take off from water.

Interesting facts:

- For over 2000 years in Asia they have used species of cormorants to help them fish. They place a ring around the bird's neck to prevent it from swallowing the fish.
- Cormorants are a problem for fish farmers - they eat millions of dollars in catfish each year from farm ponds.
- Like the anhinga, the cormorant has no oil glands to waterproof feathers and must spread their wings to dry out.
- May run along the water surface to gain speed for flight.
- Wrap their feet around eggs for incubation.
- The word cormorant is derived from the Latin words for 'sea crow'.
- Can maintain higher body temperature than anhinga - better suited to cold.

Additional Reading:

www.stanfordalumni.org/birdsite/ and
www.on.ec.gc.ca/wildlife/factsheets/fs_cormorants-e.html