

BirdWalk Newsletter 1.22.2017

Conducted by: Perry Nugent

Written by Jayne J Matney

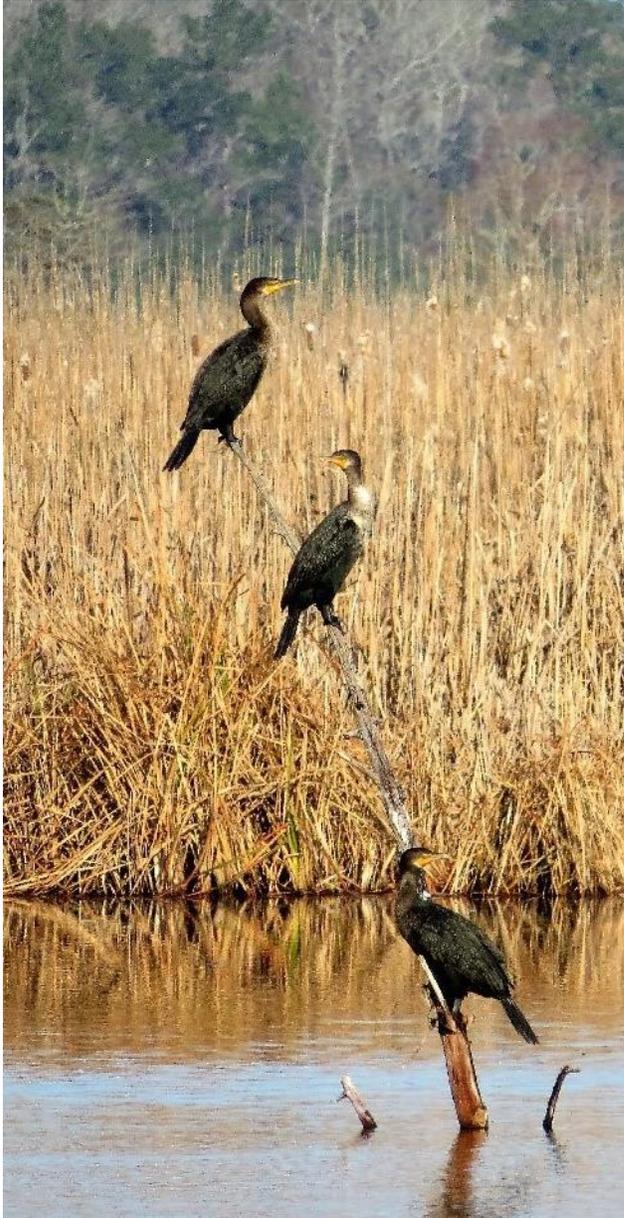
Magnolia Plantation and Gardens



In this land of winter camellias and spring azaleas, moving waters of a tidal river and still waters of the swamp, blankets of duckweed and dangling Spanish moss, a treasure trove of discoveries can be made here. Come and walk within a watercolor painting.

“If you know wilderness in the way that you know love, you will be unwilling to let it go....This is the story of our past and it will be the story of our future.”

Terry Tempest Williams



Double-crested Cormorant Jo Frkovich

Both Cormorants and Anhinga are common across North America. Now that we are seeing so many Cormorants migrating into the area, let's talk a little bit about the similarities and differences between Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) and the Anhinga (*Anhinga anhinga*). As you can see with the scientific names, they are not as closely related as some people may think. Both are closely related to the frigate birds and boobies. Most scientists believe they share in the same classification down to the order level with suborder *Sulae*. The controversy stems from an earlier designation to be in same subfamily which most scientists consider that

“overlumping” and rather the classification have a superfamily designation for the variety of birds in that family. Most common nicknames for the **Anhinga** are “water turkey” and “snakebird”. “Anhinga” comes from a Brazilian Tupi root word for “devil bird” or “snakebird”. The reason for this name was due to the fact that these birds swim just below the surface of the water with only their long

necks and thin heads sticking up above the surface. From a distance, they look as though they are snakes swimming on the surface of the water. The Indians of the area used this terminology which stuck as our nickname for them. **Both** birds are divers and fishing birds with streamline bodies, long, slender necks, and small heads. However, a difference is that the **Anhinga** has a thin, straight, pointed bill which they use to spear the fish under water while the **Cormorant** has a thicker bill with a distinct hook on the end which they use for hooking their prey under water. Following suit with their bills, the **Cormorant** has a stouter body and thicker boned structure while the **Anhinga** has a more slender, streamlined body.



Cormorants on “watering posts”

by Jo Frkovich

Both are dark in color- from dark brown to blackish in color- and have webbed feet. **Anhinga** have small silver patches on the wings and a longer tail. **Anhinga** are dimorphic in nature, meaning that the females and males are readily distinguishable. The males are dark in body, neck and head, while the females are dark in body but have a golden brown neck and head. The Cormorants are not dimorphic. **Anhinga** are different in flight as they fan out their tails. Another way in which these birds may get confuse is the fact that **both** types of birds have a “batman” style of drying feathers and conducting temperature regulation after swimming in the ponds. A more detailed discussion of this phenomenon will be discussed in a later article.

Both types of birds roost in social clusters and nest in colonies. Usually, however, they prefer to fish alone.



“Batman” display by Anhinga
by Jo Frkovich



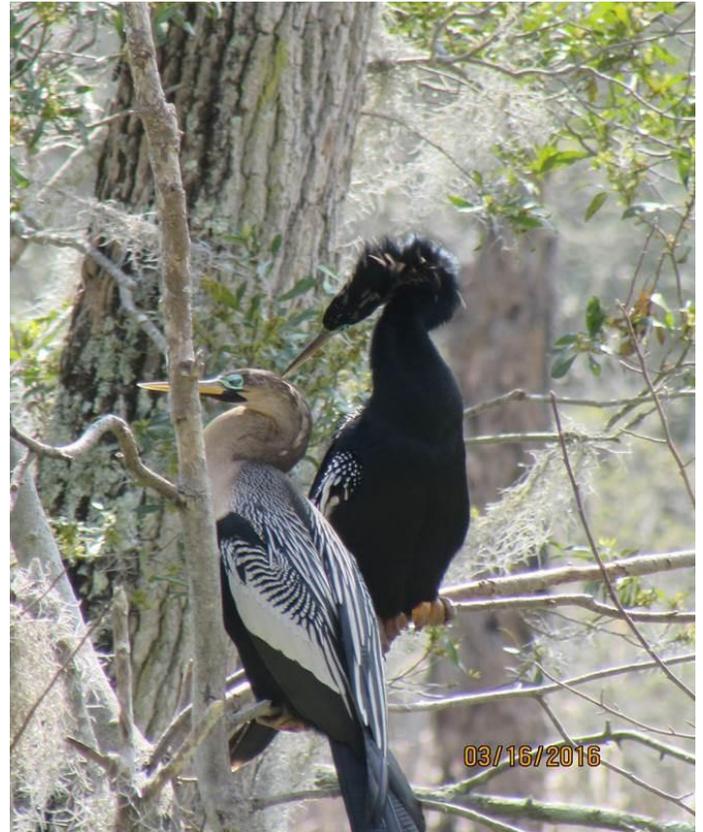
Socializing and
“Batman” display
of Cormorants

Photo by Jo
Frkovich

During breeding season, the brightness of the green to aqua-blue eyes of these birds becomes even more pronounced. Like the herons, the males usually gather the sticks for nesting while the females take charge of the actual building of the nest. Youngsters just leaving the nest will congregate in groups called “creches” then will return to their own nests for feeding time.

Anhinga usually lay around 4 eggs (range of 2-5) while the **Double-crested Cormorant** usually lay 3 to 4 (range of 1-7) eggs.

Both types of birds have whitish to pale blue eggs.



(Anhinga couple. Notice bright eye)
Photo by Becky Arndt

Fun Facts:

- Anhinga are excellent soaring birds over long distances and at 1000's of feet up into the useful thermals.
- The Double-crested Cormorant is bright blue inside the mouth!
- Besides sticks, the Cormorants have been known to use human debris such as plastics and rope to incorporate into the nest building. Dead bird bones have also been used!
- The oldest Anhinga was noted to be at least 12 years old, while a banded Double-crested Cormorant from Ontario (1984) was found in Louisiana in 2006 making the bird over 22 years of age!

*** (information from *All About Birds*, Cornell Ornithology; Audubon.com; Wikipedia) *** Due to thunder and heavy rains, the walk was cancelled.