



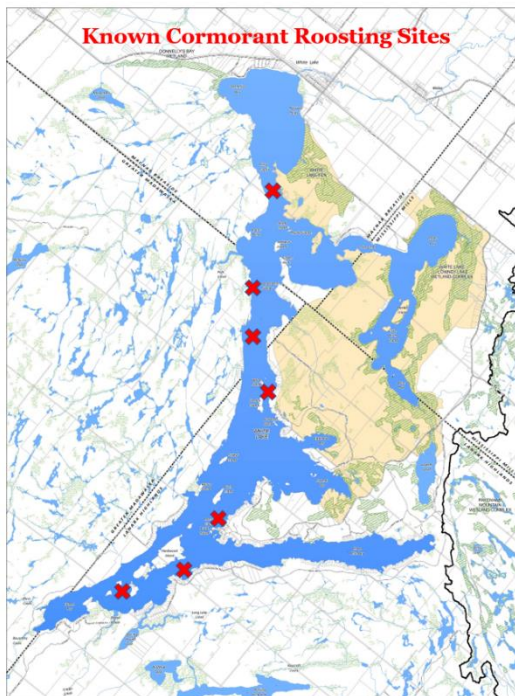
Environment Bulletin Double-Crested Cormorant Count – 2022

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The **double-crested cormorant** is widely distributed across North America near rivers and lakes as well as in coastal areas. They are a native species in Ontario including White Lake.



When large numbers of cormorants congregate in a roosting or nesting area, their droppings can kill trees and other vegetation. They also compete for food with loons and other fish-feeding birds. For this reason, the cormorant has been vilified, even though exactly the same can be said of the Great Blue Heron, which also roost communally, and destroy patches of forest where their nests are located.



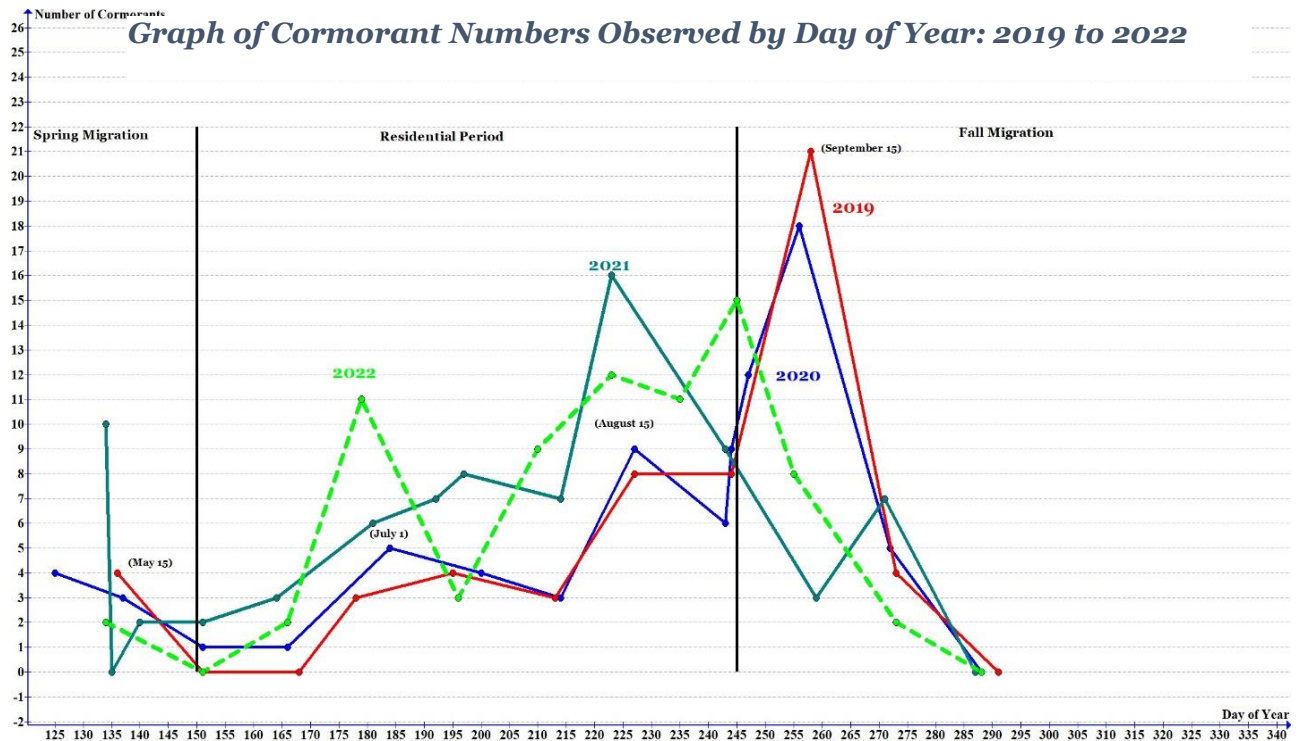
Cormorants have been using White Lake for many years. However, their numbers have always remained small. In recent years, we have noticed that the White Lake population of cormorants may be increasing.

As part of our water quality monitoring program, we decided to start tracking cormorant numbers on White Lake. Every two weeks we patrol the lake by boat and sample 9 sites in all parts of the lake. Water samples for total phosphorus and plankton counts are collected. Water temperature and clarity measurements are also taken.

During this two-hour period, we collect data on the location and numbers of cormorants. We check all of the roosting sites shown on the map as well as any cormorants we spot in flight or fishing in open water. We do not know the location of

their nesting sites at this time, but we know from the scientific literature that cormorants can nest kilometres away from the lake they use for food.

The number of cormorants observed for each date in the graph below can be taken as a minimum number of cormorants, since it is possible that birds in flight or feeding were missed. However, cormorants are communal birds and tend to aggregate in groups rather than be spread out over the entire lake. The graph below shows cormorant observations for four consecutive years.



The graph is divided into three sections marked by the two vertical black lines. During spring, as well as at the end of summer, larger numbers of cormorants are often observed. Most of these birds are migrating to other sites and only stop and linger at White Lake for a week or so.

Of greater interest are bird counts taken during the residential period (middle portion of graph). It is possible that the mid-July (~day 200) cormorant population numbers reflects the permanent resident adult population of cormorants on White Lake. This data suggests that there are about 10 to 12 cormorants making White Lake their home. This translates **to a minimum of 5 to 6 nesting pairs producing fewer than 10 offspring**, as reflected in the total cormorant count taken in mid-August.

The above graph indicates that cormorant numbers *may be slowly increasing*. We will continue with this initiative and monitor to see if this increase represents a trend or an isolated occurrence. In any case, the number of cormorants on White Lake remains small.

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