



WHITE LAKE PRESERVATION PROJECT



Double-Crested Cormorant Survey - 2020

The **double-crested cormorant** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) is a member of the cormorant family of seabirds. Its habitat is near rivers and lakes as well as in coastal areas, and is widely distributed across North America, from the Aleutian Islands in Alaska down to Florida and Mexico. They are a native species in Ontario including White Lake.

Measuring 70–90 cm (28–35 in) in length, it is an all-black bird which gains a small double crest of black and white feathers in breeding season. It has a bare patch of orange-yellow facial skin. Five subspecies are recognized. It mainly eats fish and catches its prey by swimming and diving. Its feathers, like



those of all cormorants, are not waterproof and it must spend time drying them out after spending time in the water. Once threatened by the use of DDT, the numbers of this bird have increased markedly in recent years (Wikipedia).

When large numbers of cormorants congregate in a roosting or nesting area, their droppings can kill trees and other vegetation. They also compete with loons and other fish-feeding birds for food. 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 or even entire islands where their nests are located. The authors do not support the killing of cormorants because they are a natural species to White Lake and are not present in numbers warranting action.

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 monitoring cormorant numbers on White Lake. Every two weeks we



patrol and sample 9 sites in all parts of the lake. Samples for total phosphorus are collected as are plankton samples, water temperature and Secchi depth measurements.

During this two-hour period, we collect data on the location and numbers of cormorants at 4 specific sites, where they have been observed to roost. Also included are any cormorants we spot in flight or fishing in open water. We do not know the location of the

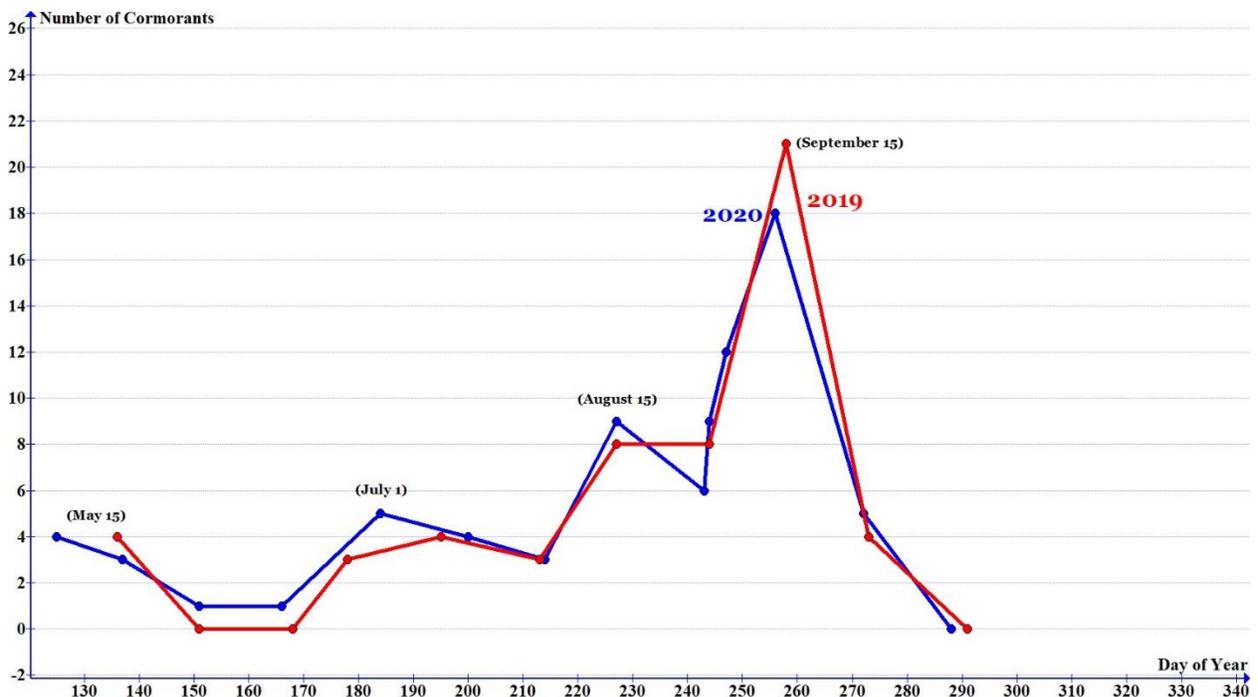
nesting sites at this time. Sites 1,2 and 4 (see map) are exposed rocks where local gulls also roost. Sites 2 and 4 are submerged until late summer whereas site 1 is available during the entire summer. Site 3 is a small islet on the north end of the Stanley Island group. Cormorants were observed there roosting in the tall pines as well as on the rocks along the shoreline.

The number of cormorants observed for each date in the tables 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.

Cormorant Count on White Lake – 2020						
Date	Map Location					Total #
	1	2	3	4	other	
May 4	-*	-	-	-	4-McLaughlin's I	4
May 16	-	-	3	-	-	3
May 30	1	-	-	-	-	1
June 14	-	-	-	-	1-Barry's I	1
July 2	3	-	-	1	1-Village Basin	5
July 18	3	-	2	-	-	4
August 1	1	-	2	-	-	3
August 14	2	1	5	-	1-Curley's I	9
August 30	1	5	-	-	-	6
August 31	-	9	-	-	-	9
September 3	-	12	-	-	-	12
September 12	9	7	-	-	2-Village Basin	18
September 28	4	-	1	-	-	5
October 14	-	-	-	-	-	-
*none observed						

Cormorant Count on White Lake – 2019							
Date	Map Location					Total #	
	1	2	3	4	other		
May 16	-*	-	-			4 in flight	4
May 31	-	-	-			-	-
June 17	-	-	-			-	-
June 27	3	-	-			-	3
July 14	3	-				1 Village Basin	4
August 1	-	-	3			-	3
August 15	6	-	1			1 in flight	8
September 1	4	-	3			1 in flight	8
September 15	10	5	1	3		2 in flight	21
September 30	3	-	-			1 in flight	4
October 18	-	-	-			-	-
*none observed							

The cormorant count for 2019 is included for comparison purposes. When the data for 2019 and 2020 (the only two years for which we have data) are plotted as separate lines on a graph, the following is obtained:



It is interesting that the data curves for both years are virtually the same, with populations peaking in mid-May, July 1, mid-August and mid-September. It is tempting to suggest

interpretations for these points, but any further analysis is not justified by the data we have at present.

What we can say is that the mid-August cormorant population numbers probably reflects the permanent resident population of cormorants on White Lake. This data suggests that it is likely that there are from 8 to 10 cormorants making White Lake their home.

The very large population numbers recorded in mid-September are more than likely seasonal visitors from other lakes migrating south. These birds arrive late, spend about 10 to 15 days feeding and resting and then leave.

We will continue monitoring cormorant populations on White Lake and attempt to find the specific nesting site(s) if possible.