



## 2024 Double-Crested Cormorant Count

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 leaving the water. Once threatened by the use of DDT, the numbers of this bird have increased markedly in recent years.

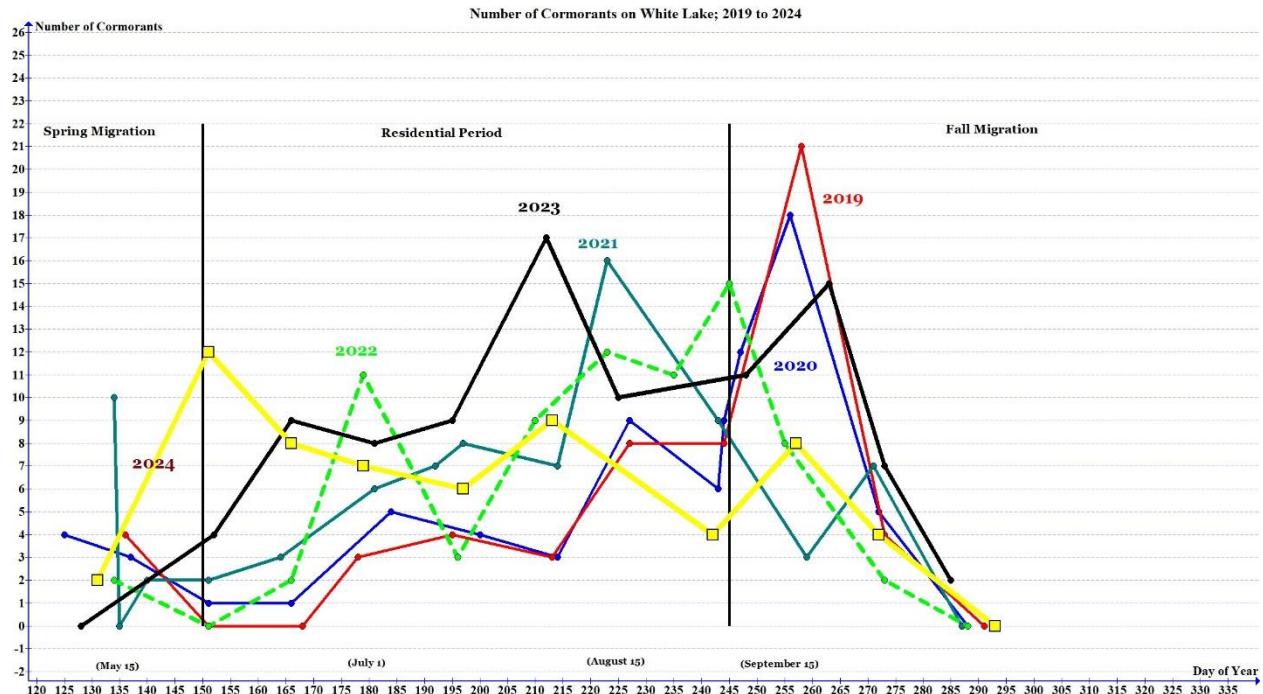


When large numbers of cormorants congregate in a roosting or nesting area, their droppings can kill trees and other vegetation. They also compete for food with loons and other fish-feeding birds. For this reason, the cormorant has been vilified, even though exactly the same can be said of the Great Blue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

In fact, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) [web page](#) on cormorants specifically says “Populations of double-crested cormorants are increasing in number

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## Graph of Cormorant Numbers Observed by Day of Year: 2019 to 2024



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 section of the graph). It is possible that the mid-July cormorant population numbers probably reflects the permanent resident adult population of cormorants on White Lake. This data suggests that there are currently less than ten cormorants making White Lake their home. Considering the presence of non-reproductive juveniles, this translates to about 4 or 5 nesting pairs.

The graph below shows the maximum number of cormorants observed on the lake during the nesting period. Over the last six years, the numbers have ranged from 8 to 17 individuals. The blue line is the statistical best fit line for the population data. This line has a positive slope which indicates that there may be a very weak trend towards increasing numbers of cormorants on the lake.

We will continue with this initiative and monitor if this increase represents a trend or an isolated occurrence. In any case, the number of cormorants on White Lake remains small.

## Maximum Number of Cormorants on White Lake During Nesting Season

