Identifying Cormorants in Coastal British Columbia

*T*hree species of cormorants are found in BC year-round. Predominantly black birds, they have a distinctive hooked, laterally compressed bill, noticeably stiff tail feathers and naked, coloured skin on the throat. On land, they often adopt a distinctive posture standing upright with wings outstretched to dry their feathers.

Cormorant Indigenous language name:
_____

Double-crested Cormorant

Indigenous language name: _____

- BC's largest cormorant
- Found in both freshwater and saltwater habitats
- Face is yellow/orange in all ages/plumages
- Adults are all black
- Juveniles have pale gray/beige breast and throat
- In flight, note thick neck and bulky build

Double-crested Cormorant adults (top)
Juvenile (bottom left) (Photos: Ralph Hocken) ▶

Pelagic Cormorant

Indigenous language name: _____

- Smallest of three BC cormorant species
- Note thin neck and beak
- Relatively long-tailed, noticeable when perched
- Adults have distinctive white patch on rear-flanks
- Adults are a glossy blackish-green overall with deep-red lores
- Juveniles are all dark brownish-black; note structure
- In late winter/spring, adults are brighter red around the face and have thin white plumes on the neck

Pelgaic Cormorant face and profile showing long tail (above by Mike Yip)

Adult swimming showing white patch (below by Ralph Hocken) ▶

Brandt's Cormorant

Indigenous language name: _____

- Adults are greenish-black like Pelagic but note thicker neck/bill
- Relatively shorter-tailed than Pelagic
- Note beige-coloured throat-patch, present at all ages
- Juveniles have tan-coloured breast; compare bill colour to Double-crested
- More gregarious than Plagic Cormorant
- In spring/early summer, adults have wispy white plumes on their head and blue skin at the base of the bill

Brandt's Cormorant in flight (above left by Guy Monty)
Adult with wispy white plumes (above right by Mike Yip)
Adult in breeding plumage swimming (below by Guy Monty) ▶

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