

# Cormorant Monitoring and Management Program in Bonnyville, Alberta

Double-crested cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) are a migratory bird that breed in the northern hemisphere, nesting in trees or on the ground on islands at waterbodies across Alberta. They are named for the tufts of feathers or crest on either side of their head they grow during the breeding season – their eyes also turn a brilliant turquoise color. On average, double-crested cormorants live for six years but may live up to 20 years. They mature and are able to breed at age three.

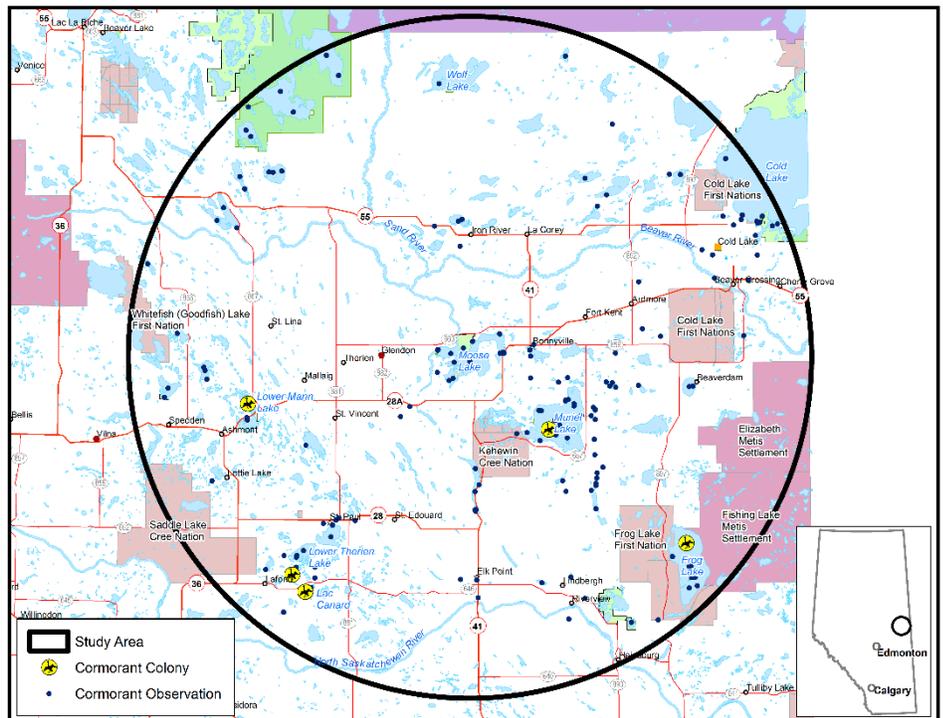
Cormorants are opportunistic, generalist feeders that consume up to 20% of their body weight in fish per day. These birds don't have a preferred species of fish, and their diet will be dominated by whatever species is easiest to catch and can fit in their mouths. Cormorants will fly up to 30 – 60 km from their nesting colony to feed. Cormorants can negatively affect fisheries populations when the number of cormorants feeding exceeds the fish resources available in the area.

Cormorants are native to Alberta, their population size has varied over the years.



## Program overview

Alberta Environment and Parks is taking action to understand the impact cormorants have on local fish numbers and manage cormorant numbers. Cormorants can negatively affect fish populations when the number of cormorants feeding exceeds the fish resources available in the area. This spring, Fish and Wildlife staff will be oiling eggs on the Muriel and Frog lake colonies so they don't hatch. Staff will also be monitoring colonies, completing nest counts and investigating other lakes in the area for additional cormorant colony locations. Egg oiling is an effective technique to reduce the cormorant populations over time. Oiling eggs prevents the embryo from developing and is less likely to cause the cormorants to abandon the nest or colony and re-nest elsewhere. Egg oiling can also be done with the least amount of disturbance to the colony and other co-nesting species.



For more information, contact [aep.outreach-services@gov.ab.ca](mailto:aep.outreach-services@gov.ab.ca)

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## Double-crested cormorant monitoring and management

Cormorants have been observed feeding at Moose Lake, but there are no colonies living on the lake. AEP believes some birds may be coming from colonies on nearby lakes. Cormorant movement surveys will be completed to help determine cormorant movements and feeding patterns in the Bonnyville area. Diet samples will be collected, and a diet analysis will be completed to determine what the cormorants are feeding on.

Cormorants are a co-nesting species, which means they nest alongside other bird species such as pelicans, great blue herons, gulls and terns, and care must be taken to prevent disturbance to these other species. As part of this project, co-nesting species will be identified, inventoried and mitigation measures implemented to reduce negative impacts to these co-nesting species.



## Fish population monitoring

Fish population assessments will be conducted on a number of waterbodies in the area of Moose Lake to determine the number and sizes of fish species in the lake. The purpose of these surveys is to assess the fish population trends, and also to assess food availability for cormorants in the area.

Cormorant diet sampling will occur at colonies to understand what fish species the cormorants are feeding on, and where the fish were harvested from.

Angler surveys may be completed to determine fishing effort and harvest on lakes within the study area to help understand the angling pressure and harvest from these waterbodies.

