

TASL News January 1991



TAKE A SECOND LOOK
42 Baker Avenue
Lexington, MA 02173

Next TASL Harbor Censuses: January 20 & February 17, 1991

THE GREAT CORMORANT PLUNGE

In the early 1980s, winter in Boston Harbor was heaven for Great Cormorants. On TASL counts the Hingham sector routinely reported hundreds on Shag Rocks -- when they could be seen. (Upon occasion, as in the February 1981 tally, the weather was so bad that neither Nahant nor Hingham reported in.)

At that time Double-crested Cormorants were few and far between on winter counts. I remember that a single Double-crested on a Christmas count would occasion murmurs of surprise, if not disbelief. ("Details!" would demand Bob Stymeist.)

All that began to change by 1984 or 1985. Suddenly the counts of Greats began to plunge, and, at the same time, dozens of wintering DCs were being found, primarily in East Boston at the rotted piers behind Central Square, and at the Reserve Channel Bridge in South Boston. Here are the numbers:

	Great Corm.	DC Corm.	Corm. (sp)
FEB 80	430	0	0
FEB 81	110	1	0
JAN 82	430	0	0
JAN 83	506	0	0
JAN 84	287	27	0
JAN 85	78	17	0
JAN 86	147	25	39
JAN 87	96	10	0
JAN 88	55	32	18
JAN 89	46	60	9
JAN 90	14	37	47

Double-crested Cormorants have expanded their breeding numbers in Massachusetts phenomenally in the last ten years. Professor Jeremy Hatch of UMass:Boston once told me the numbers breeding in Boston Harbor had nearly doubled in a few years in the middle of the decade. They are also now being seen by the hundreds at various places on the Cape, where they used to be considered rare. This expansion may be a periodic population growth, or it may be a one-time deal.

Great Cormorants breed further north, in Maine and the Canadian Maritimes. I am not aware if their numbers have shown any significant fluctuations on their breeding grounds. As for the plunge in their wintering number in Boston, I have heard it conjectured (Maury Hall, pers. comm.) that the increased use of gill-nets for fishing in and around the harbor may be trapping and killing more of these birds. They do fish further out than DCs, out where serious fishermen have their nets set.

Does anyone have a good theory to explain the coincidence of plunging numbers of Greats and exploding numbers of DCs?

My thanks to Maury Hall for doing some of the initial research on this topic.

Soheil Zendehe



BOSTON HARBOR TASL CENSUS --- 18 NOVEMBER 1990

SPECIES

NAHANT WINTHROP CENTRAL QUINCYW QUINCYE HINGHAM TOT11/18/90

1	COMMON LOON	2	2		3		3	10
2	RED-THROATED LOON						1	1
3	PIED-BILLED GREBE						1	1
4	RED-NECKED GREBE	1						1
5	HORNED GREBE	3	1	18	23	13	6	64
6	NORTHERN GANNET	6						6
7	GREAT CORMORANT	22		5	8		2	37
8	DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT		24	61	15		20	120
9	CORMORANT (SP.)			3		4	42	49
10	GREAT BLUE HERON		7	5	7		1	20
11	BRANT	5	224	159	245	700	54	1387
12	CANADA GOOSE			1				1
13	GREEN-WINGED TEAL		3					3
14	AMERICAN BLACK DUCK	111	163	363	583	24	258	1502
15	MALLARD	3	25	39	9	1	26	103
16	GREATER SCAUP		90	14	29		43	176
17	COMMON EIDER	630	1017	4	136	83	549	2419
18	OLDSQUAW						35	35
19	BLACK SCOTER	6						6
20	SURF SCOTER					1	1	2
21	WHITE-WINGED SCOTER	106	124	26	1	87	45	389
22	COMMON GOLDENEYE	5	2	54	117	6	133	317
23	BUFFLEHEAD	303	352	564	465	107	1133	2924
24	HOODED MERGANSER						16	16
25	RED-BREASTED MERGANSER	465	245	788	190	60	886	2634
26	ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK			1				1
27	AMERICAN KESTREL			2				2
28	BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER	2	12	10	23			47
29	GREATER YELLOWLEGS		5	1	6			12
30	RUDDY TURNSTONE				2	2		4
31	SANDERLING	28	175		1	2		206
32	PURPLE SANDPIPER	1						1
33	DUNLIN	14	78		3			95
34	LAUGHING GULL		30					30
35	COMMON BLACK-HEADED GULL		13	2				15
36	BONAPARTE'S GULL	1	207	75	2	82	492	859
37	SMALL ALCID (SP)				1			1
38	SNOWY OWL			1				1
39	HARBOR SEAL	2		2				4

WEATHER CLOUDY
WIND NE 20-35
TEMP 5C, 40F
HI TIDE 11:30 AM

PARTICIPANTS IN THE CENSUS OF 11/18/90:

NAHANT: Kenton Griffis, Elizabeth Sims
WINTHROP: Wayne Barron, Katie Durham, Pat Randall
CENTRAL: Susan Abbott, Scott Bickerton, Michael Fager, Kathy Foley, Cheri Sebring, Soheil Zendeh
QUINCY WEST: Mike McInnis, Rebecca Roberts
QUINCY EAST: Dave Desmond, Betsy & Fred Peterson
HINGHAM: Maury Hall

Special thanks to Mr. Richard Marchi of Massport for arranging access to the airport.

TASL (Take a Second Look) is staffed and organized entirely by volunteers. For the November census we had a serious shortage of volunteers to cover most areas. It is important that we have good coverage for the mid-winter (January and February) censuses. Please pick any of the short-staffed sectors -- which means all areas except Central -- and call Maury Hall (268-7571) or Soheil Zendeh (863-2392H, 923-0941W) to volunteer.

TASL data is compiled by Maury Hall. Please mail your data to him at 27 Swallow Street, South Boston 02127. This newsletter is produced by Soheil Zendeh.

JANUARY CENSUS COMPILATION AT BOSTON CITY HALL

Through the kindness of Ms. Lorraine Downey of the City of Boston Environment Department, we have access to Room 801 in Boston City Hall on the afternoon of January 20. Use the back entrance across from Faneuil Hall and speak to the Security Officer for access to the elevator and to the room. Please try to be at the compilation as close to 2 PM as possible.