

THE BLACK-FACED CORMORANT BREEDING AT OUTER HARBOR

by MAX WATERMAN

For a number of years I have noticed, when passing in boats, numbers of large black and white cormorants roosting, and at times nesting, on the island breakwater at Outer Harbor. I had assumed them to be Pied Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax varius*) but had not gone closer to investigate. Other bird observers who had seen these birds and with whom I have spoken recently, had also assumed that they were Pied Cormorants.

It was with some surprise, therefore, when landing on the breakwater with a group of junior members on May 28, 1967, to find a large nesting colony of Black-faced Cormorants (*P. fuscescens*). There were 250-300 nests containing approximately 700 eggs in all. Egg clutches were mostly of two, many of three and some of four or five. Most eggs were fresh. One naked young was seen and there were 55 unfinished nests.

The colony was visited again on June 22 for the purpose of banding adults and young. Most sitting birds were very approachable, some actually protecting their nests, only leaving when almost touched, and then only after a great deal of grunting and flapping. They were easily captured for banding with a fowling hook. One bird even allowed itself to be banded whilst sitting on its nest. Later in the nesting season the adults were much more difficult to approach. Some birds covered their nests with seaweed and aquatic vegetation before leaving, as do grebes, in some cases this being so well done that the nests appeared empty.

The numbers of birds banded in four visits were as follows:—

June 22	.....	.....	32 adults,	182 nestlings
July 1	.....	.....	27 adults,	123 nestlings
July 15	.....	.....	5 adults,	100 nestlings
Sept. 23	.....	.....	0 adults,	105 nestlings
Total	.....	.....	64 adults,	510 nestlings

Only three dead banded birds were found at the nesting colony, indicating a very low mortality, and only three recoveries had been made away from the nesting area by January, 1968, at Coobowie Beach (Yorke Pen.), 47 miles distant, Ardrossan (Y.P.), 41 miles distant, and Tennyson Beach, five miles away.

To my knowledge the nearest breeding colonies to that at Outer Harbor are on Rocky Islet (Port Victoria), Troubridge Island and Baudin Rocks (off Robe).

Fish specimens picked up on June 22, 1967, were Trumpeter 12, Weedfish 1, Red Mullet 2, and Weedy Whiting 16. If this is typical of their diet, it would appear that, as with my experience with the Pied Cormorant, they feed mainly on non-commercial species.

On reflection, I should have realized much earlier that the Outer Harbor colony was not of Pied Cormorants, for I have never known this species to breed anywhere except on trees or shrubs, whereas the Black-faced Cormorant always nests on the ground (or rocks as in this case). It is obvious, therefore, that this species has been breeding at Outer Harbor for quite a few years.