PHALACROCORAX GRACULUS.

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Crested Cormorant, or Shag.

Pelecanus graculus, Linn. Syst. Nat., tom. i. p. 217.

— *cristatus*, Fab. Faun. Grœnl., p. 90.

Carbo cristatus, Temm. Man. d'Orn., 2nd edit., tom. ii. p. 900, tom. iv. p. 565.

Halieus graculus, Licht. Verz. der Doubl. des zool. Mus. zu Berlin, p. 86.

Phalacrocorax graculus, Leach, Syst. Cat. of Indig. Mamm. and Birds in Brit. Mus., p. 34.

Hydrocorax graculus, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. viii. p. 87.

Carbo graculus, Meyer, Taschenb. deutsch. Vög., tom. ii. p. 578.

Phalacrocorax cristatus, Steph. Cont. of Shaw's Gen. Zool., vol. xiii. p. 83.

Pelecanus leucogaster, Vieill. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., 2nd edit., tom. viii. p. 90.

Carbo brachyurus, Brehm, Vög. Deutschl., p. 822.

Graculus Linnœi, Gray and Mitch. Gen. of Birds, vol. iii. p. 667, *Graculus*, sp. 6.

It is not solely amongst the feathered denizens of the calm and beautiful tropical forests that nature has scattered her gifts of ornamentation with unsparing hand; but in an impartial spirit has she also profusely adorned such groups as the Grebes, the Auks, the Penguins, and the Cormorants—birds inhabiting the watery wastes and surge-washed rocks of either hemisphere. What would this world be without ornament and variety? Would it not be tame and wearisome? Would even the two Cormorants which inhabit this island be half so interesting were their distinctive characteristics less conspicuous? Some species of this genus have an extensive tuft of feathers springing from the forehead, of which the bird here figured may be cited as an example; others, again, have numerous white stræ down the sides of the neck and chest, as seen in our well-known common Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*); while some of the foreign kinds have lengthened floating hair-like plumes springing from various parts of the body, as in the New-Zealand *P. punctatus*. I have long been of opinion that such ornaments are not given only for the purpose of attraction between the sexes, but that their presence is due, and consecutive, to certain physiological conditions connected with the pairing-season—inasmuch as it is during that period that such adornments are present in their finest colours, and often (as, indeed, in the present instance) not confined to one sex.

It is time, however, to turn to the bird here represented, and to state in what part of the British Islands it resides: I say resides; for it is really a resident, scarcely ever removing from the district or rock upon which it has taken up its abode, either in winter or summer. At one time (even so recently as when I was collecting specimens for the due illustration of my 'Birds of Europe') the bird was common at the Needles, in the Isle of Wight; but in that most southern and charming part of our south coast it does not now exist; or if it does, it is but sparingly; nor is it more plentiful along our southern and south-western coasts. On the other hand, it is as numerous as it has ever been in the northern parts of Scotland, in the Hebrides, and in Ireland, as will be seen by the accounts furnished by those excellent observers and elegant writers, Macgillivray and Thompson, the former of whom says:—

"The Crested Cormorant, which is generally distributed along our coasts and very abundant in many parts of Scotland, especially the western and northern islands, is a constant inhabitant, frequenting the caves and fissures of the rocky headlands and unfrequented islands. It reposes at night in these caverns or on shelves of the rocks, often in great numbers, being of a social disposition, but keeping apart from other birds. Its roosting-places are always rendered conspicuous by the great quantity of white dung with which they are crusted. It is pleasant to see them emerge from their abodes on some wild coast before sunrise, and silently wing their way in files towards their fishing-grounds. They fly with uninterrupted beats of their wings, keeping at an inconsiderable height, and scarcely ever crossing an isthmus however narrow. On arriving at some sandy bay or shallow strait, they alight in succession, coming heavily upon the water, shake themselves, and commence their search by immersing their heads. On perceiving an object, the Shag darts forward in a curve, rising out of the water, and then plunging headlong. Its agility in this element is astonishing; and it often remains submerged from one to two minutes. Its food consists of small fishes, such as the young of the coal-fish (*Gadus carbonarius*), which are extremely abundant on all our northern coasts, and among which it commits great havoc; the time of fishing is chiefly at the ebb. It is not nearly so shy as the Cormorant; and I have seen it pursuing its prey almost in the immediate neighbourhood of many persons who were fishing with small nets for the fry above mentioned; but even in such cases it keeps deep in the water, and is easily frightened away. It resorts in great numbers to the maritime

caves of the Hebrides. In the morning they may be seen at South Town, in Harris, covering the sea to a considerable extent on their passage from the caves of Liuir and Toe-head to their fishing-stations in the sound. I have counted a hundred and five in one flock; and the number exceeded this considerably, as many were under water at the time. When commencing the act of diving, they rise with a spring entirely out of the water. The nest is generally bulky, but sometimes very scanty, formed of fuci, twigs, heath, and grass rudely put together, nearly flat or with a shallow cavity containing two, frequently three, and sometimes four eggs, never more, bluish white in colour, subelliptical, and very narrow in proportion to their length, but varying greatly in size as well as form, some being extremely narrow, others of considerable breadth; their general form is oval, one end being always decidedly smaller and sometimes even pointed. Their length varies from two inches and seven twelfths to two inches and three twelfths, the breadth from an inch and seven twelfths to an inch and five twelfths. They are generally soiled by the feet of the birds, like those of the Gannet and Grebes. At first the young are bare all over, and of a purplish black colour; presently, however, they are covered with a brownish black down, soft but not close, and leaving the head, part of the neck, and the abdomen bare; then the feathers gradually sprout, the birds rapidly increase in size, and in seven or eight weeks are fledged. They are at first fed with half-digested fish, disgorged by their mother, and at length, becoming very plump, are esteemed delicate food by the Hebridians.

"There is a large cave on the west coast of Harris, celebrated for the number of Shags which reside in it, and so lofty that a boat can enter to a considerable distance without having the masts taken down. I have several times visited it in the breeding-season, when the birds had numerous nests on the sides. On approaching the mouth of the cave, we see a considerable number of Shags conspicuously perched on the little shelves and projections, their dusky figures strongly relieved by the whitened surface of the rock. Some fly overhead as we approach; but more drop into the water, like a stone. On looking down we see them rapidly wending their way under the boat, flying with outspread wings. The Shags being now alarmed, are seen writhing their long necks as they gaze upon us. Presently a shot is fired! another! The dead birds drop on the water; the living plunge headlong into it; many advance on wing, but being frightened by the upraised oars dart into the water. After all the uproar several remain standing near their nests, as loth to quit them. I have often crept into one of these caves, which has a narrow passage from the land, and, advancing stealthily, have seen eight or ten Shags below, at the distance of a few yards. On the arrival of the mother, the young open their bills wide, stretching up their necks with a wriggling motion, and receive their food from her mouth. The nest, as well as the rocks around, is covered with white dung; and a disagreeable stench, as of putrid fish, emanates from them. It does not appear that this species often visits lakes or rivers; nor is it ever met with far out at sea, its favourite fishing-stations being the eddies of channels, bays, and estuaries. Great numbers frequent low rocks or insular crags for the purpose of resting at some period of the day, generally between ebb and high water. There they preen themselves, spread out their wings in the sun or wind, and repose in a standing posture with contracted neck. In dry weather I have often seen individuals, while swimming, erect themselves in the water, and, spreading out their wings, remain in that posture for a long time.

"It is equally abundant in Orkney, where Mr. Low says he has 'observed sometimes five hundred in a flock, especially when they had fallen in with a shoal of small fish.'"

Thompson says that this species is resident in Ireland, inhabiting all quarters of the coast, and gives a similar account of its habits and manners.

It is surely unnecessary to give a detailed description of so well-known a bird; but it may be well to mention that the young, during their first autumn, have the greater part of the under surface white, and are destitute of the decorative crest.

The figure represents an adult in summer plumage, about three fourths of the natural size.

Gould, John. 1873. "Crested Cormorant, or Shag, *Phalacrocorax graculus* [Pl. 53]." *The birds of Great Britain* 5, -. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.324097>.

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