



NEOTROPIC
CORMORANT



ANHINGA
A BIRD WORTHY OF
A DOUBLE-SPREAD!

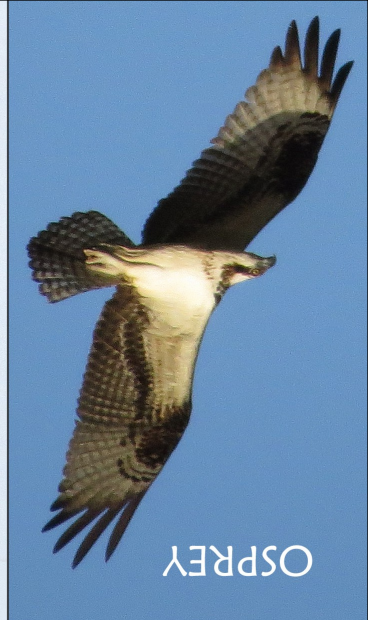


PIED-BILLED
GREBE



FEMALE ABOVE,
MALE TO RIGHT

BELTED
KINGFISHER



OSPREY



BAYOU CITY BIRDING
ZINE #6
DIVING BIRDS

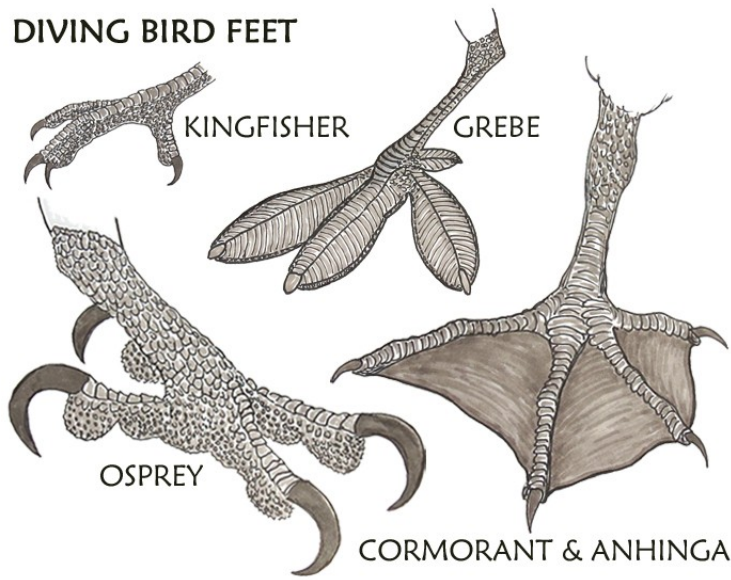
This zine features birds that have special characteristics that allow them to dive from the air, perches, and the surface of the water to catch fish. Look for them around areas of bayous and ponds that offer perches. Birds are shown in order of size, with the largest ones first.

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DOUBLE-CRESTED
CORMORANT
ADULT BELOW,
JUVENILE TO LEFT

DIVING BIRD FEET



ANHINGA (member of the Darter family)

WHEN: Year round, but uncommon in winter

LOOK FOR: This snazzy cousin of the cormorants, with a longer neck and tail, dagger-like bill, and a mix of white and black feathers on its shoulders/wings. The neck/breast is black on males, two-tone tan on females.

FIELD NOTES: Anhingas swim with only their neck and head above water. When fishing, they lurk underwater, waiting to stab an unsuspecting fish through the side. They then surface, flip the fish in the air, and swallow it whole. Anhingas are less common than the other diving birds, but are well worth the search.

1st SEEN ON AT

OSPREY

WHEN: September to May

LOOK FOR: White head with a brown stripe from the eye to shoulder, brown back/wings/tail, and white breast/belly. Females have a streaky brown necklace.

FIELD NOTES: Osprey dive for fish from the air, snatching them from the surface or plunging into the water. Ospreys have powerful feet and sharp talons, allowing them to catch fish of up to four pounds and then carry them to perches. Ospreys are the only birds in this group that can use their beaks to tear fish into pieces, rather than having to swallow them whole.

1st SEEN ON AT

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT

WHEN: October to May

LOOK FOR: A brownish-black, long-bodied bird with a long neck, a long hooked bill, and orange skin above and below the bill and eyes (see cover photo).

FIELD NOTES: The necks of cormorants and anhingas stretch to allow them to swallow fish larger than seems possible. Cormorants float with only the top portion of their backs showing, and use their webbed feet to swim underwater. Bigger fish are brought to the surface and chewed on before being swallowed. Juveniles have off-white feathers on the front of their neck and breast.

1st SEEN ON AT

NEOTROPIC CORMORANT

WHEN: Year round, but less common in winter

LOOK FOR: A smaller version of the Double-crested Cormorant, but with a longer tail and tiny white feathers that form a “V” at the back corner of the bill.

FIELD NOTES: Unlike the feathers of most other birds, the feathers of cormorants and anhingas absorb water quickly, which makes it easy for them to dive and swim underwater. Once they are finished fishing, cormorants and anhingas must stand around with their wings held out to drip dry. Juveniles have light brown feathers on the front of their neck and breast.

1st SEEN ON AT

PIED-BILLED GREBE

WHEN: Year round

LOOK FOR: A cute brown bird with a fluffy white butt. In spring/summer the bill is pale blue with a dark band, while in winter the bill darkens and the band fades. Smaller than a duck, but with a longer neck.

FIELD NOTES: The Pied-billed Grebe has the unusual ability to sink and rise by changing its buoyancy. When scared, it will peek about with only its eyes and bill above water. Grebes have lobed feet set far back on their bodies, making it very hard for them to walk. Grebes spend almost all of their time in the water.

1st SEEN ON AT

BELTED KINGFISHER

WHEN: Year round, but uncommon in summer

LOOK FOR: Blue-gray head/back/wings/tail and breast band, white collar and belly, and an extra-long bill. Females have a rusty-red band across their belly. When excited, kingfishers raise the feathers on their head into a shaggy crest. Its feet are tiny, with two toes joined.

FIELD NOTES: Kingfishers watch for fish from perches and then dive into the water, sometimes hovering above the water first. Birds bring their catch back to a perch, stunning larger fish by slapping them around before swallowing them head first.

1st SEEN ON AT

LEARN MORE...

While zines will help you know which birds to watch for, photos and words have their limits. To learn more, watch video of these and other birds at ARKive.org. Start by entering a bird’s full name into the search box. If no results come up, search for the bird’s “second” name only (i.e., Grebe vs. Pied-billed Grebe, or Darter vs. Anhinga) and then view video of similar species. No matter what, DO NOT miss the video of the osprey titled “osprey demonstrating amazing fishing skills.” Want to see more? Check out live “bird cams” at sites like cams.AllAboutBirds.org, which in the spring include footage of birds caring for nestlings.

Download more of the Bayou City Birding Zines at WhiteOakBayou.org