Pelagic Cormorant

Class: Aves
Order: Suliformes
Review Status: Peer-reviewed
Version Date: 26 June 2020

Note: Previously known as *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*.

### Conservation Status

*Table 1 Conservation status according to state, national, and international organizations and agencies.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NatureServe</td>
<td>G5/S5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADF&amp;G</td>
<td>Species of Greatest Conservation Need</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IUCN</td>
<td>Least Concern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USFWS</td>
<td>Bird of Conservation Concern</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Final Rank

Conservation Category: V. Orange

Unknown status and either high biological vulnerability or high action need

*Table 2 ASRS categorical scores. Higher numerical scores denote greater concern.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Status</td>
<td>-20 to 20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biological</td>
<td>-50 to 50</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>-40 to 40</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Status

Variables measure the trend in a taxon’s population status or distribution. Higher status scores denote taxa with known declining trends. Status scores range from -20 (increasing) to 20 (decreasing).

**Population Trend in Alaska (-10 to 10)**

Existing data from 2009-2018 suggest that some colonies are declining, while others are increasing (Dragoo et al. 2019). Given these conflicting trends, and because data are not available throughout its range in Alaska, we rank this question as 0- Unknown.

Score: 0
**Alaska Species Ranking System – Pelagic Cormorant**

**Distribution Trend in Alaska (-10 to 10)**
Unknown.  
Score: 0  
**Status Total:** 0

**Biological**

Variables measure aspects of a taxon’s distribution, abundance and life history. Higher biological scores suggest greater vulnerability to extirpation. Biological scores range from -50 (least vulnerable) to 50 (most vulnerable).

**Population Size in Alaska (-10 to 10)**
Statewide population is unknown, but likely between 10,000-25,000 birds based on counts from various colonies (Gibson and Byrd 2007; Romano et al. 2014; Corcoran 2016).  
Score: -6

**Range Size in Alaska (-10 to 10)**
Occurs year-round in scattered colonies in coastal areas from Southeast Alaska to Cape Lisburne in northwestern Alaska. Also occurs throughout islands of the Bering Sea and the Gulf of Alaska, including some Aleutian Islands and Bering Sea Islands (Denlinger 2006; Hobson 2021). Estimated range size is 100,000 sq. km., based on range map from ACCS (2017a).  
Score: -2

**Population Concentration in Alaska (-10 to 10)**
Concentrates in small, dispersed colonies, however, given the number of documented colonies and the range of Pelagic Cormorants in Alaska, the number of sites is likely >250 (Denlinger 2006).  
Score: -10

**Reproductive Potential in Alaska**

**Age of First Reproduction (-5 to 5)**
Unknown, but suspected to be 2-3 years (Hobson 2021).  
Score: -3

**Number of Young (-5 to 5)**
One clutch annually. Clutch size ranges from 1-7 eggs, with annual means ranging from 1.0 to 3.6 (Drummond and Williams 2015; Higgins et al. 2018; Hobson 2021). Because these averages span 2 ranking categories, we rank this question as 0.5 * B + 0.5 * C.  
Score: 2

**Ecological Specialization in Alaska**

**Dietary (-5 to 5)**
Consumes medium-sized, non-schooling fish (e.g., Pacific sand lance, sculpin, cod) and marine invertebrates (e.g., crustaceans, marine worms, eel) (Ainley et al. 1981; Dragoo et al. 2011; Hobson 2021). The proportion of specific prey items varies regionally and across years (Ainley
et al. 1981; Dragoo et al. 2011), suggesting a certain degree of adaptability at the species level. At the same time, individuals appear to have specialized foraging behaviors, which may limit their ability to respond to environmental change (Kotzerka et al. 2011).

Score: 1

**Habitat (-5 to 5)**

During breeding season, nests on steep cliffs and in crevices that are difficult for predators to access; also nests on human structures such as navigation beacons and bridges (Hobson 2021). Typically forages no more than a few kilometers from the shore (Kotzerka et al. 2011; Hobson 2021).

Score: 1

**Biological Total: -17**

**Action**

Variables measure current state of knowledge or extent of conservation efforts directed toward a given taxon. Higher action scores denote greater information needs due to lack of knowledge or conservation action. Action scores range from -40 (lower needs) to 40 (greater needs).

**Management Plans and Regulations in Alaska (-10 to 10)**

Protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA 1918). Subsistence harvest is allowed and subject to closed seasons (AMBCC 2020). Harvest rates for cormorants appear to be low (Naves and Otis 2017).

Score: -10

**Knowledge of Distribution and Habitat in Alaska (-10 to 10)**

Habitat associations and range during the breeding season are known from multi-species surveys conducted in Southeast Alaska (Slater and Byrd 2009), southcoastal (Cushing et al. 2018), the Aleutian Islands (Drummond and Williams 2015), and the Pribilof Islands (Romano et al. 2014). Foraging sites have also been identified as part of a foraging behavior study in the Gulf of Alaska (Kotzerka et al. 2011). Comparatively, little is known about the distribution of Pelagic Cormorants during the non-breeding season (but see Hatch et al. 2011b).

Score: 2

**Knowledge of Population Trends in Alaska (-10 to 10)**

Colony and/or nest counts have been conducted on some islands, with limited trend information in some cases (e.g., Romano et al. 2014; Corcoran 2016; Dragoo et al. 2019), however, surveys are not consistently conducted across years or locations, and no statewide data are available.

Score: 2

**Knowledge of Factors Limiting Populations in Alaska (-10 to 10)**

Little is known about the factors that limit this species’ population or distribution in Alaska. Subsistence harvest and bycatch mortality for cormorants appears to be low (Naves and Otis 2017; Krieger et al. 2019; but see Corcoran 2016). Elsewhere in this species’ range, studies have shown that food availability, breeding experience, and nest-site selection influence breeding success (Hobson 2021). The importance of these factors on pelagic cormorants in Alaska is unknown.
Supplemental Information

Variables do not receive numerical scores. Instead, they are used to sort taxa to answer specific biological or management questions.

**Harvest:** Not substantial

**Seasonal Occurrence:** Year-round

**Taxonomic Significance:** Monotypic species

**% Global Range in Alaska:** >10%

**% Global Population in Alaska:** 25-74%

**Peripheral:** No

References


https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.pelcor.01.1

Kotzerka, J. 2011. Identification of foraging behaviour and feeding areas of three seabird species breeding sympatriically in a highly productive regime, the northern Gulf of Alaska. Ph.D., University of Kiel, Kiel, GER.


