

Paul Clyne. Anhingas at Jackson Park, Chicago, 28 Apr 1995 - page 1 of 2

TWO ANHINGAS AT JACKSON PARK,  
CHICAGO (COOK COUNTY), ILLINOIS,  
28 APRIL 1995

I observed a flock of two  $\delta$ -plumaged Anhingas (*Anhinga anhinga*) in flight at about 5900 South in Jackson Park, Chicago, on 28 April 1995. As far as I am aware, this is the first record of this species for Cook County, and only the second for northern Illinois. The first for northern Illinois was established just a week previous, when a female was found in DuPage County on 21 April (*vide* Chicago Audubon Society Bird Report).

I watched the birds for about 4-6 seconds at about 08:15 as they glided in an east-southeast direction near Music Court Bridge, just south of the Museum of Science and Industry. I initially noted them with full sun at my back, and followed their passage until direct sun blinded my view. I made a short run to try to relocate them, but to no avail. They were gliding at a considerable height, but just close enough to ground to catch the attention of the naked eye and to allow superficial aspects of shape and color to be determined under magnification. Details were observed using Bausch & Lomb 10 x 40 binoculars.

Both birds were simultaneously in view under binoculars, and I saw no differences in size, shape, or patterning between the two individuals.

Overall, the birds appeared to be artifacts composed of several species with which I am more familiar. They were most reminiscent of Double-crested Cormorant, but with (1) long, strongly squared tails, recalling the tail of Sharp-shinned Hawk in shape and proportions; (2) heron-like yellow bills attached to a narrow head/neck extension; and (3) rather long, bluntly pointed wings, perhaps most like the wing-shape assumed by Northern Harrier when cruising forward. The wings were longer, narrower, and more pointed than in Double-crested Cormorant. The trailing edge of the wing was perpendicular to the body, while the leading edge showed a substantial crook at the wrist. The wings were held flat and motionless, and the tails were unfanned throughout the brief time of observation. The bills were pointed straight forward.

I judged the birds to be similar in size to Double-crested Cormorant or American Bittern, but, as the birds were soaring in open sky, no reliable measure of size was available.

Color and patterning were visible on the underparts only, and distance allowed no more than gross patterning to be discerned. Foreparts (head and upper breast), dingy whitish buff. Rest of underparts, wings and tail from below, dull black. The primaries and secondaries showed a somewhat silvery finish, creating a slight but nonetheless conspicuous contrast with the plain blackish underwing coverts; this wing patterning was reminiscent of Turkey Vulture, although not as striking as in that species. Bill, yellow. Other soft parts not visible.

Immediately on termination of the sighting I tape-recorded a full description of the birds, and then consulted the National Geographic Society *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 2nd ed. (1987). I found the illustration of the scaring  $\delta$  in that volume to be a striking match to the birds I had seen, with minor differences: (1) the foreparts were paler (approximately the color shown on the fishing individual in that volume, perhaps even paler); (2) the tails on the Jackson Park birds were less fanned, more squared; (3) since I was viewing the birds directly from below, there was no visible crook in the neck; rather, the bills appeared simply to be attached to a narrow extension of undifferentiated head and neck; and (4) the head/neck extension was somewhat less than shown in the Geographic guide, suggesting birds flying with slightly more retracted necks.

Note that the National Geographic plate illustrates a contrast between black wing-linings and more silvery-gray flight feathers, as noted on the Jackson



Paul Clyne. Anhingas at Jackson Park, Chicago, 28 Apr 1995 - page 2 of 2

Park birds, although I do not find this contrast explicitly stated in descriptions of *A. anhinga*.

The combination of long, squared tails with long, heron-like bills on an otherwise cormorant-like bird is consonant only with the Anhingidae. Within this family, the combination of very pale foreparts (including the upper breast) and otherwise black underparts is apparently unique to *A. anhinga* (Johnsgard 1993, del Hoyo et al. 1992). Within *A. anhinga*, the basic patterning is consistent with first spring birds of either sex, and otherwise of females (Palmer 1962, Oberholser 1974).

My previous field experience with the Anhingidae is confined to one close observation of a perched ♂-plumaged Anhinga in Costa Rica. I have seen thousands of Cormorants - mostly Double-crested, but seven species overall in my travels.

My identification to species was not instantaneous, but occurred one or two seconds into the sighting, while the birds were still under study. My point-blank reaction on taking binoculars to the birds was not one of potential identification, but rather, "What the hell?!!" Next came scrambled thoughts of "herons" (prompted by the straight yellow bills) and "cormorants", followed by "Anhingas". I spent the next half hour trying to dismiss "Anhinga" before I conceded that the observed details were inconsistent with any other species.

The description was prepared the day of the sighting based on full details tape-recorded immediately after the sighting. Research eliminating other members of Anhingidae was carried out the following day.

References cited:

- del Hoyo, J. et al., eds. 1992. *Handbook of the Birds of the World*, Vol. 1. Barcelona, Spain: Lynx.
- Johnsgard, P. 1993. *Cormorants, Darters, and Pelicans of the World*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian.
- National Geographic Society. 1987. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society.
- Oberholser, H. 1974. *The Bird Life of Texas*, Vol. 1. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Palmer, R. 1962. *Handbook of North American Birds*, Vol. 1. New Haven, CT: Yale.

  
Paul R. Clyne / [REDACTED]

Phone / FAX: [REDACTED]