

*The cormorant*  
*- Like a flying saurian*



*by*  
*Keld Jensen*

## *The cormorant - Like a flying saurian*

*I have always had a feeling that the cormorant was more original than other birds. It looks like some kind of a flying saurian, a creature that must belong to ancient times.*

*I often recognize this large black web-footed bird in the sky above my birthplace in Himmerland. Large crowds in V-formation on their way home from the hunting far out at sea.*

*At the lake Toftesøen in the raised bog Lille Vildmose in Himmerland the largest colony of cormorants in Denmark is located. Toftesøen is a small lake without large amounts of fish. But at the shores of the lake a lot of birch trees grow. The cormorants have chosen to locate their nest in these birches.*

*I do not remember the cormorants from my childhood. I still feel that these mysterious birds are as strangers here in my home district. The cormorant colony established itself at the lake in 1982. In 1996, the colony rose to above 3,300 nests and the number of nests has been as high as 4,100 nests. In recent years*

*the colony is in constant decline. In 2011 the researchers counted 1,200 nests in the trees.*

*The cormorants find the food in the waters of Kattegat many miles away. Most of the food supply consists of flatfishes and other fish species from these waters east of Lille Vildmose.*

*The hook-shaped tip of the beak provides a steady grip on the slimy fish. The beak goes behind the eyes of the cormorants. When the nestlings are fed, they stick their head right down the throat of the adult birds, which then regurgitate their stomach contents up. The Cormorants are also capable to bring water to the nestlings in their throat pouch.*

*In the bird-nests, consisting of interlaced branches, the bigger and bigger nestlings balance waiting for the parent birds to return with food and water. The trees die within a few years. The droppings of the cormorants corrode the branches and the trees die. The combination of the dead guano-white trees and those flying saurian can make me shudder.*

*The day I visit the cormorant colony a fresh breeze was blowing. It seems like an impossible task for the nestlings to hang on to the thin branches near the nest.*

*It seems that the cormorants stand up. The feathers of the tail are stiff, so they can provide stability when the cormorants balance on the nest or on the fishing stakes out at sea. The feet are placed far back on the body, so the cormorants can use them to power when they hunt under water. Often the birds spread their wings. It is not only to keep the balance on the thin branches at the top of the trees, but also to dry their feathers, which are not, as in other birds, hydrophobic.*



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# COLOPHON

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