

**It's a Cormorant thing! – Have YOU seen a
Kent one? – Dylan Wrathall**

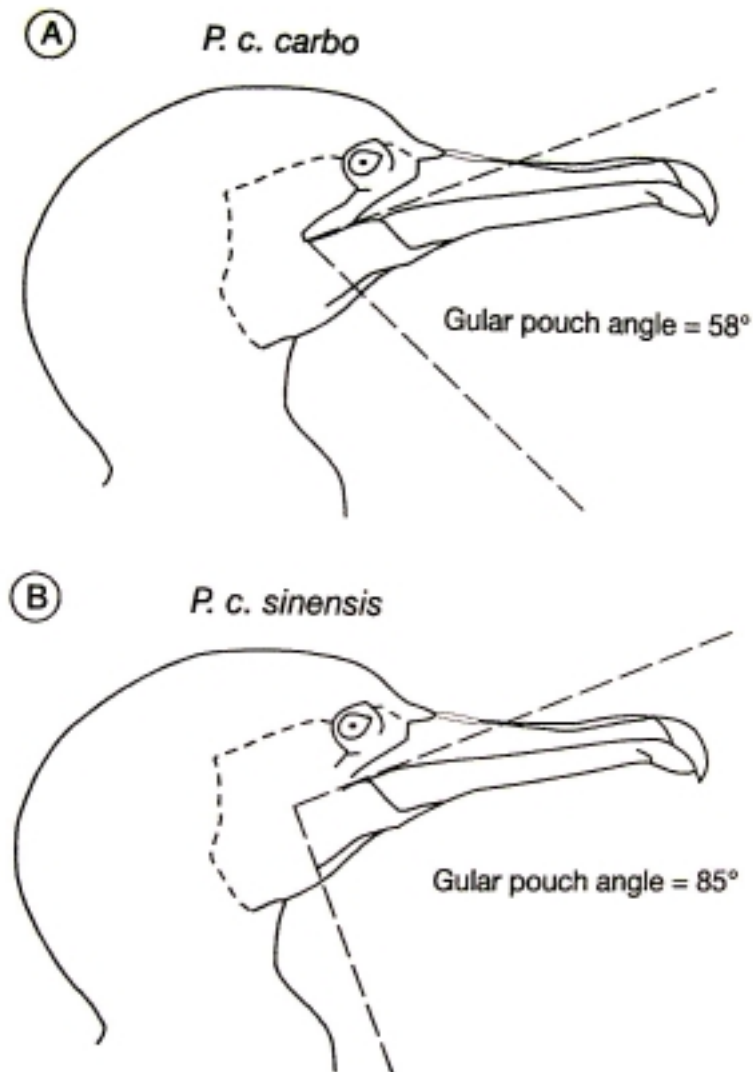


This whole, bizarre, situation has arisen as a direct consequence of recent e-mail exchanges with Ross Ahmed (a Durham birder) and for that I am greatly indebted

I have only become interested in Cormorants – *Phalacrocorax carbo*, since moving to Thanet in August 2000. They are a very familiar part of the coastal, and increasingly inland, avifauna. Arguments have raged between fishery owners, conservation bodies and government about the need to regulate numbers. Personally, I didn't have much of an opinion –

if they are a problem – deal with it! There were always loads of Cormorants about. Now, however, it's not so fast, old chap! It appears that the nominate race may not be as common as we had presumed – certainly not around Thanet!

A superb id paper (Sub-specific Differentiation of Great Cormorants) was published by Newson S E, Hughes B, Russell I C, Ekins G R & Sellers R M (2004) and the main part of this was posted on the C-R Cormorant website. Basically, it called into question some of the previously held criteria for separating *P.c. carbo* and *P.c.sinensis*. The main thrust of the paper revolved around the significance of the angle between the gape line, **not** the beak line, and the edge of the gular pouch. (See illustration below)



Now assuming that all things are equal and the powers that govern birding are consistent, surely there will be an argument for “splitting” these two forms – if only for the politics of “bio-diversity”. Why save one species when two will do? They have done it with Carrion/Hooded Crow, Brent Geese, Bean Geese, Redpolls, Crossbills and many more – LGRE is in heaven! So where is this leading? Well, if you are still reading? I have never, knowingly, seen a Greater Cormorant of the nominate P.c.carbo in Kent. Yes, I have looked long and hard at birds in Ramsgate Harbour, Stodmarsh/Grove Ferry and along the coast between Reculver & Minnis Bay, yet never have I managed to find a bird that conforms with the gular pouch angle that Newson et al, use as the measure for the two races. What may be even more interesting is how many Kent birders (300 club or not) can claim to have seen the nominate race? Even those who were birding in the 1950’s won’t have back up field notes to support P.c.carbo based upon the angle of the gular pouch! Sinensis Cormorants are dominant in East Kent, to the extent that I have my doubts as to there being any nominate birds left. It will be an interesting few weeks for me, as I am now determined to find a P.c.carbo around the Thanet area. If nothing else, it will give me something to do whilst I await the first of the spring migrants! It might be worth other birders having a good look at Cormorants as well – it could be another tick in a year or two!

Immature sinensis in Ramsgate Harbour - November 2005



