



Amazing Animals Fact sheets

Cormorants and Darters

These waterbirds are found throughout much of Australia, even at inland waterways during times of flood. These birds are very intelligent and in some overseas countries they are trained by fisherman to capture fish in place of using nets.

Australian Darter

Darters are a water bird that is closely related to Cormorants. Their feathers are not waterproof and since they are underwater hunters you will usually see them sitting out of the water on a log or rock with their wings spread right out drying themselves. Their feathers are permeable to water to allow for decreased buoyancy so they can sink to catch their prey. They have an oil gland at the base of their tail which they use while preening and squeezing the water from their feathers.

With its body submerged and only its head and neck above the surface, the Darter resembles a snake rising from the water; hence one of its popular names the Snake-bird. They have very long and sharp beaks, which they use with their long neck to spear their prey.

Habitat

The Darter frequents freshwater and saline lakes, swamps and rivers, and prefers sheltered areas. Darters are found throughout Australia, on the east, north and west coasts wherever waterways exist.

Diet

The Darter submerges for up to a minute at a time and surfaces for a few seconds between each dive. Tiny prey such as insects are swallowed during swimming but a fish or tortoise is carried back to the surface and moved about until it can be swallowed head first. Large items requiring up to 20 minutes of manipulation may be taken to a perch.

Breeding

At the onset of nesting, a male will defend a site and decorate it with leafy twigs. Nests tends to be solitary or very well spaced colonies. The male collects the nesting material while the female builds a rough nest platform. The first egg is laid 2-3 days after pairing and the rest at 2-3 days intervals. Incubation starts with the first egg and both sexes do the work. The Darter breeds in spring and summer, but breeding birds can be found every month.

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