

## Cormorant — Agasuuq

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AGASUUT MAANI CALI AMLERTAARTUT. – THERE ARE ALWAYS A LOT OF CORMORANTS AROUND HERE.

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Photo: Detail of cormorant skin parka. Etholen Collection, National Museum of Finland.

Four varieties of cormorants (*Phalacrocorax* spp.) live in Alaska, three in the Kodiak Archipelago. These are the double-crested cormorant, the pelagic cormorant, and the red-faced cormorant. These birds gather in coastal colonies where they feed on fish and crustaceans captured by diving. Cormorants are often found nesting on precipitous cliffs. Although the location of their colonies changes from year to year, cormorants are widely available.

Alutiiq hunters once captured cormorants with nets braided from sinew or bull kelp. Like a gill net, people stretched these nets and left them near nesting locales to entangle birds as they moved to and from feeding areas. Alutiiq ancestors also hunted cormorants at night with clubs. Cormorants were a source of food, and their feathered hides were valued for clothing, headdresses, and blankets. Alutiiq people prized the smooth throat skin of the cormorant, which has a green iridescent sheen, for ceremonial parkas.

In Prince William Sound, people believe that cormorants chatter at night when they return to their nests to tell each other where they have been. Another saying holds that a bald-headed person is someone who has had a cormorant vomit on his head!