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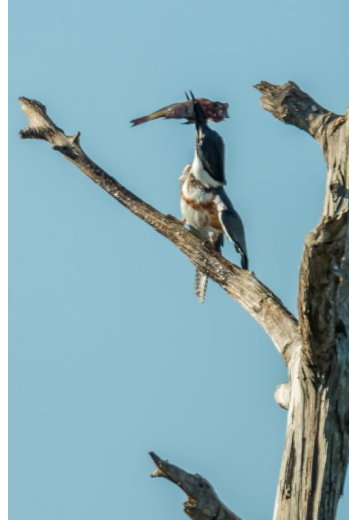
Double-crested Cormorants frequently get more than their meal when they dive.

GONE FISHIN'

Some of my friends are quite accomplished fishermen. They have all the latest equipment and lures, and are right up to date on the best techniques to be successful. But I wonder how they would make out if they had to catch fish the way birds do. That is: with their mouths, hands or even better, with their feet, and sometimes swimming to catch them. And keep in mind that birds must be successful or go hungry. They can't have any days with no luck or come home empty-handed. Kind of puts "fishin" in a different light, doesn't it!



Two species that go swimming to catch their daily meal are the Anhinga (*left*) and Double-crested Cormorant, and they each have a different style. The Anhinga typically spears its prey with its sharp beak, while the Double-crested Cormorant is more likely to grab its meal with its hooked beak, although both species can utilize the other method as well. Anhingas sometimes have difficulty dislodging the speared fish and will pound it against a tree or other object to get it loose. Double-crested Cormorants will occasionally gather debris along with the fish as it snares its meal in the fish's habitat.



Some birds hover over the water until they see a fish near the surface, and then plunge into the water to catch their prey with their beaks. Okay, you fishermen, try that! Sometimes the fish is almost as large as the bird, such as with this Belted Kingfisher (*left*). But generally, such as with this winter plumaged Forster's Tern (*right*) the fish is tiny and easier for the bird to catch and carry.

Another fish-by-mouth bird, using a unique technique, is the Black Skimmer, which, as its name implies, skims along the water with its longer lower beak just below the surface until it encounters a tiny fish, which it scoops up, in, and down the gullet

Keep in mind, the Black Skimmer (*below, right*) must use a very shallow, above the water at all times, wing beat pattern as it patrols the water. (Of the hundreds of photos that I have taken of Black Skimmers slicing through the water surface, this is the only one I have where the bird actually encounters and takes in a fish.)



Still another hover and dive for the fish technique is that used by the Osprey (*left*), sometimes colloquially called the "Fish Hawk," which then catches its daily bread by the talons (feet?). Any fishermen among you who want to try that?



Another unique fishing style, in the water, is that used by the Reddish Egret (*right*), called "canopy feeding," in which the bird



spreads its wings wide over the water, creating an area of shade from the hot sun, which in turn attracts small fish, which again in turn, become heron food.

But many fish eating birds emulate human fishermen (or is it the other way around?) by standing on the shore, or on a branch at the waters edge, or



in the shallow water, and simply wait until an unsuspecting and oblivious fish wanders by, and plucks it out of the water. Smaller birds

catch smaller fish, such as this Least Bittern (*below, left*), and larger birds catch larger fish which they jealously guard, like this Great Blue Heron. (*below, right*) Finally, some fish eating birds, like humans who catch their fish at the grocery store, simply bide their time and scrounge whatever is left of the carcass of a fish caught by a more astute fishing cousin, and dine on the scrumpy remains of what was once a noble fish. This Crested Caracara (*below, left*) is one such bird.



And so, dear reader, the next time one of your friends brags about his or her fishing prowess, simply ask them how many fish they have



caught by mouth, or by hand or by foot. If they look bewildered at your question, remind them that birds catch them that way and don't have nearly all the equipment and paraphernalia that human

fishermen/women have. If they contend that such a comparison is unfair, remind them that birds have tiny little brains, tiny little hands/feet and mouths, but still generally catch their daily limit. But the birds do have an advantage, as they have been doing it all their lives, and work at it daily. Perhaps if your human friends put that much time and effort into their fishing they might one day become as proficient as birds. But then again, probably not.

For an excellent video of an Osprey snagging fish by the fist-full, and second, so large it can barely get air-borne, see: youtube.com/watch?v=nA3LtXnNIto.