



**Barry Lawrence Ruderman
Antique Maps Inc.**

7407 La Jolla Boulevard
La Jolla, CA 92037

www.raremaps.com

(858) 551-8500
blr@raremaps.com

Common Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax Carbo*. Plate CCLXVI.

Stock#: 69967
Map Maker: Audubon
Date: 1835
Place: London
Color: Hand Colored
Condition: VG+
Size: 35 x 22.3 inches
Price: SOLD



Description:

"Look at the birds before you, and mark the affectionate glance of the mother, as she stands beside her beloved younglings!" - John James Audubon, Ornithological Biography, page 458

An exceptional Havell edition John James Audubon aquatinted and engraved plate depicting a male and female common cormorant with two hatchlings perched on their nest above the ocean. This hand-colored aquatint comes from the largest format of plates in the double elephant folio *Birds of America*.

The scene depicted on the plate took place in Labrador in 1833, high above the crashing waves of the St. Lawrence, when Audubon crawled along a cliff to get a better view of the bird's nesting and parenting habits.

This is plate CCLXVI (266) from the first double elephant folio edition of Audubon's *Birds of America*.

Audubon's Descriptive Text

Audubon provided an extensive description of the present image and the birds depicted within it in his *Ornithological Biography*, as well as this recitation of the exciting scene from which this plate was drawn:

Look at the birds before you, and mark the affectionate glance of the mother, as she stands beside her beloved younglings! I wish you could have witnessed the actions of such groups as I did while in Labrador. Methinks I still see the high rolling billows of the St Lawrence breaking in foaming masses against the huge cliffs, on the shelves of which the Cormorant places its nest. I lie flat on the edge of the precipice some hundred feet above the turbulent waters, and now crawling along with



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all care, I find myself only a few yards above the spot on which the parent bird and her young are fondling each other, quite unconscious of my being near. How delighted I am to witness their affectionate congratulations, hear their lisping notes, mark the tremulous motions of their expanded throats, and the curious vacillations of their heads and necks! The kind mother gently caresses each alternately with her bill; the little ones draw nearer to her, and, as if anxious to evince their gratitude, rub their heads against hers. How pleasing all this is to me! But at this moment the mother accidentally looks upward, her keen eye has met mine, she utters a croak, spreads her sable wings, and in terror launches into the air, leaving her brood at my mercy. Far and near, above and beneath me, the anxious parent passes and repasses; her flight is now unnatural, and she seems crippled, for she would fain perform those actions in the air, which other birds perform on the ground or on the water, in such distressing moments of anxiety for the fate of their beloved young. Her many neighbours, all as suspicious as herself, well understand the meaning of her mode of flight, and one after another take to wing, so that the air is in a manner blackened with them. Some fly far over the waters, others glide along the face of the bold rock, but none that have observed me realight, and how many of those there are I am pretty certain, as the greater number follow in the track of the one most concerned. Meanwhile the little ones, in their great alarm, have crawled into a recess, and there they are huddled together. I have witnessed their pleasures and terrors and now, crawling backwards, I leave them to resume their ordinary state of peaceful security.

...

Later in the common cormorant passage of the *Ornithological Biography*, Audubon includes extensive anatomical notes on the birds "Adult Male in March. Plate CCLXVI. Fig. 1.", "Female in July. Plate CCLXVI. Fig. 2.", and "Young Birds unfledged. Plate CCLXVI. Fig. 3, 4."

Detailed Condition:

Full sheet of paper with binding marks at top edge. Original hand-coloring. Watermarked "J WHATMAN 1835" at the male's head. Very minor mat toning at the edges.