



Dr/ Lloyd Glenn Ingles,
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common name	Great Egret
scientific name	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>
phylum	Chordata
class	Aves
order	Ciconiiformes
family	Ardeidae
habitat	wetlands, ponds, shorelines, and wet fields
size	0.9 to 1.0 meters tall

description The Great Egret is a wading bird with white feathers. It has a long neck and very long, black legs. Its bill is long, thick and yellow. An adult Great Egret is more than 3 feet tall.

fun facts During the late 1800's and the early 1900's, the Great Egret was hunted almost to extinction. Its beautiful white plumes (feathers) were used to decorate ladies' hats. In 1903, Egret plumes were so popular they were worth twice their weight in gold! Millions of egrets, herons and other birds were killed every year just to decorate women's hats.

In the late 1880's two wealthy Boston women decided to put a stop to it. They invited all the well dressed ladies of the city to come to tea parties. They made them promise not to wear hats with bird feathers on them. This movement spread from women to men and from state to state. This was the start of the Audubon Society. Two hundred years later the Audubon Society is still hard at work to protect birds all around the world. You can join if you want to help!

life cycle The breeding season usually begins in mid-April. Great Egrets come to nesting grounds called rookeries. Here they build nests of sticks and twigs in medium-sized trees. The male begins building the nest. He then brings materials to the female who finishes it. The mated pair often return to the same nest year after year. They repair or rebuild it as needed. The female lays 4 to 5 oval, blue-green eggs. The male and female take turns sitting on the nest for 23 to 24 days.

When the hatchlings [emerge](#), they have white down (soft, small feathers) and pink bills. Both parents take care of the young. After about 3 weeks the young egrets start walking on branches near the nest. About 40 days after hatching, they begin to take short flights.

ecology

During the day Great Egrets forage (hunt for food) alone or in small groups. They forage in wetlands and other shallow waters or mud. They like the marshy shores of lakes and ponds, or slow moving streams. You will also see them in farmers' irrigation ditches and flooded cropland. In vernal pools, Great Egrets feed on Algae, Rotifers, Copepods, Seed Shrimp, Water Fleas, Aquatic Beetles, Aquatic Snails, Damselfly and Dragonfly larvae, the tadpoles and adults of Pacific Chorus Frogs, California Tiger Salamanders and Garter Snakes.

Great Egrets are at the top of the food web. Few predators want to attack such a large bird, with such a big beak! Great Egrets avoid most predators by roosting in tall trees at night with other egrets and herons. By nesting in large groups, the birds can warn each other of predators. The young of Great Egrets are taken from their nests in rookeries by Raccoons, Great Horned Owls, Red-tailed Hawks and other hawks. Coyotes, Red-tailed Hawks and other hawks will also prey on Great Egrets while they are foraging.

investigate

If you want to watch Great Egrets, visit their feeding habitats. Be sure to stay away from rookeries. Egrets do not like visitors when they are nesting. You must move very slowly and quietly. The birds are very shy. They will fly away if you come too close. A pair of binoculars will help you see better without scaring them away.

April and May are good times to watch for Great Egrets at vernal pools. When big or deep vernal pools are drying up, Great Egrets fly in for a big meal. The larvae of Damselflies, Dragonflies, and Aquatic Beetles are large and [abundant](#) in big pools. There are also plenty of tadpoles and frogs, and Garter Snakes nearby to hunt them. When a Great Egret spots a Garter Snake, the hunter soon becomes the hunted. Imagine how a Great Egret gets a long snake down its long throat!

Any easy way to see Great Egrets is to watch for them along the road. You will often see them in rice paddies, wet fields or ditches. See how many other species of wading birds you can find in the same places. What critters probably live in the water where you see Great Egrets foraging?