



Great Blue Herons

What are they?

The great blue heron is the largest heron in North America. Herons are wading birds with long legs and powerful, large beaks. Bitterns and egrets are also considered part of the heron family.

What do they look like?

At four feet tall, the great blue heron is much bigger than its cousins (bitterns, egrets, and other herons.) Although this kind of heron is called "blue," it's actually more of a gray-blue. This color appears on its wings, belly, and back. When its wings are fully extended, they can span more than six feet.

Where can you find them?

The great blue heron hunts in shallow coves along the Bay and in the rivers that flow into the Bay.

How do they behave?

Great blue herons spend 90% of the time they are awake looking for food. They sometimes wade through the Bay's shallow waters, looking for something to eat. At other times, they stand and wait, not moving an inch for long periods of time. When they spot something good to eat, they freeze for a second and then lunge forward, grabbing the prey with its sharp beak.

What do they eat?

Great blue herons eat small fish, swallowing them head first. They are one of the top predators in the Bay's food chain, "dining" on frogs, salamanders, snakes, lizards, shellfish, small birds, rodents, grasshoppers, and other insects such as dragonflies.

What eats them?

Crows, gulls, eagles, foxes, hawks, and raccoons often eat heron eggs or young heron. However, adult great blue herons have very few enemies. Bobcats, coyotes, red-tailed hawks, crows, and bald eagles do occasionally kill an adult, but it doesn't happen very often.

Creature Feature

These majestic birds live in rookeries, or a collection of nests occupied by pairs of birds and their babies. Occasionally, single birds live in a nest alone. The rookeries are located near the shore, on islands or wetlands. Unfortunately, many of these spaces have been disappearing, threatening the great blue heron's habitat.



Photo Source: George W. Robinson, Cal Images

