

For Creative Minds

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Great Blue Heron Facts

A Great Blue Heron's eyes are positioned on its head so it can see behind as well as from the front. A heron can focus its eyes very fast so it can search for fish at close range, then quickly switch to a long distance view to watch for predators.

Heron's long necks and pointy beaks allow them to quickly spear fish or other small animals.

When flying, herons' long necks are "s-shaped."



They can fly 20 to 30 miles an hour. Next time you are in a car, ask the driver to tell you when you are driving as fast as a heron flies.



The heron's "backward facing" knee is really its ankle and heel. Its real knee is inside its body cavity hidden inside its skin and under its feathers.

The heron has a tiny bit of webbing between two of its front toes so it won't sink into marshy ground.



When a Great Blue Heron preens, it uses its toes to scratch a patch of “powder down,” a type of feather that helps insulate a bird. The tips of these feathers disintegrate into a powdery substance that Ornithologists (scientists who study birds) think may soak up water and/or be used to preen and clean feathers. When clean, it uses a “comb” on its middle front toe to straighten its feathers.

Great Blue Herons are large birds! When standing, they are approximately 4 feet tall. How tall are you? How does that compare to a heron?



The wingspan (from the tip of one wing to the other wing) is about 6 feet. Use a measuring tape to see how big 6 feet is. Do you know anyone or anything that is about 6 feet tall?



Hérons are a type of bird. All birds have feathers, although not all birds fly (penguins don't). In fact, birds are the only animals that have feathers. Birds hatch from eggs, breathe air, and are warm-blooded.

Their very long legs help them to walk quietly through the shallow water.

Adult Great Blue Herons only weigh about 5 pounds. How much do you weigh?



How Did Henry Hunt?



Herons are **carnivores**. That means they eat meat. But, they don't go to a grocery store for their food; they have to find it by themselves. Herons spend most of their awake-time looking for food. If you've seen a heron, chances are that you saw it standing in shallow water, hunting.

It probably looked like it was standing still doing nothing. But it was watching very closely for **prey** (animals it wants to eat) to come to it. By standing still for so long, other animals (fish, salamanders, frogs, etc.) don't realize that it is a bigger animal, and they swim up to it.



The heron quickly grabs the smaller animal with its strong beak and enjoys a tasty meal.



Food for thought: wetlands



Great Blue Herons live around wetlands all over North America from mangroves and salt marshes to freshwater swamps, lakes, and slow-moving rivers.



What could happen to Great Blue Herons if wetlands were destroyed?



What are some things that you and your family can do to prevent pollution in wetlands?



Heron Life Cycle Matching Activity:

See if you can put the herons' life-cycle events in order to spell the scrambled word.

Herons breed in large groups called colonies. They usually build big nests high in trees or on cliff edges close to water. The male gathers sticks and the female builds the nest.



At 10 to 12 weeks the chicks leave the nest and their parents for good.

T

The eggs hatch after 26 to 30 days.

E



R

Females lay between two and seven pale blue eggs. Both parents take turns sitting on the eggs to keep them warm.

Chicks live in the nest for about two months and both parents feed them. That's when they take their first flight.

A

Answer:
Great

