

## **COOL FACTS ABOUT THE GREAT BLUE HERON**

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**rev. 3/26/ 2020**

**Scientific Latin name: Ardea herodias**

**Height: 4 feet – 3 inches**

**Weight: 5 pounds**

**Beak: long straight beak – approx. 5-6 inches long**

**Wingspan- 6 feet**

**No. of toes: 4 -3 in front plus back toe enables it to perch in trees**

**Egg size and color: pale blue- a little larger than a chicken egg**

**Call- loud squawk.**

**Flies: with its S shaped neck retracted. Thermodynamic.**

**Serially monogamous- ie. All parents and chicks go their own way at the end of the season. They do not stay together as a family. If parents are successful and see each other again at the nesting site, chances are they will become a pair again.**

**Chicks- generally do not reproduce until they are approx. two years old. Exceptions have been noted.**

**How to id. a parent vs. chick:**

**Parent has two black plumes hanging off the head with white head in middle. Chick has black feathers on head- first sticking up, later lying down.**

**Female heron lays eggs asynchronously- ie. every other day, so that the oldest chicks have an advantage if there is a food shortage. Oldest chicks would intimidate youngest in order to get more food (siblicide).**

**Life span- To date the longevity record is 23 years.**

**However, the average lifespan in the wild is 15 years.**

**Diet: fish, gophers, small birds, aquatic invertebrates. GTBH (great blue heron) uses its' razor sharp beak to stab and grab prey. The great blue has an S shaped curve in the neck, which enables the heron to strike its prey at 90 miles per hr.**

**Incubation and feeding: Both parents incubate, and feed the chicks. After hatching, both parents take turns staying with chicks for first four weeks to keep them warm at night. Adults feed chicks by regurgitation into the bottom of nest. They do not feed beak to beak. Chicks pull parents' beak down to stimulate regurgitation.**

**At six weeks, chicks are full size like their parents. It takes ten to twelve weeks after hatching for chicks to fledge.**

**NOTE: PREDATORS ARE RARE AT THE STOW LAKE COLONY EXCEPT FOR RACCOONS.**

**If a nest was attacked by a Great Horned Owl or a Golden Eagle, the parent heron would usually stand by or fly away and not try to fight or repel the attack. The heron's goal is to remain fit and alive for another day and reproduce. \*\*\*the word "fitness" is a term of art meaning ability to reproduce.**

**However, there is a case on video of a Great Horned Owl attacking a heron nest- the heron stays with the nest and emits a loud scream until the owl leaves and flies away.**

**However, if another heron (not the partner) flew close, ie. invaded the territory of the heron, the parent would chase the heron away by flying at him or her.**

## **HERONS OFTEN COMPARED TO CRANES**

**Most compared to another large bird in USA: the Sandhill Crane - Scientific name: Grus canadensis**

**Winters in Nebraska in March by the thousands. Amazing spectacle!**

**Color: slate gray with a crimson cap**

**Sandhill crane height: 3-5 feet**

**Weight: Sandhill Crane: 6.5- 14 pounds. Wingspan-5-6 feet**

**Call: Loud Yodel as they fly. Flies with long neck extended.**

**Major Differences: Cranes mostly nest in vegetation in shallow water or near water not in trees like the great blue herons.**

**Cranes have only three toes, so they cannot perch in a tree.**

**Cranes eat tubers and vegetation on the plains. Cranes do not eat fish!**

**Cranes may travel together by the thousands.**

**Herons mostly travel solo or no more than ten in a group.**

**Oldest crane on record: 36 years. They stay together as a family for one year. All cranes engage in dancing. Though it is commonly associated with courtship, dancing can occur at any age or season. Herons don't dance.**

**Sources: International Crane Foundation, Baraboo, Wisconsin**

**<http://www.savingcranes.org>**

**Cornell Lab of Ornithology- [www.allaboutbirds.org](http://www.allaboutbirds.org)**