
SCIENCE in the Park

Great Blue Heron

Ardea herodias

Family: Ardeidae

Piscivore / Carnivore/ Predator

Native to Virginia



This majestic, elegant bird, considered by some to be the symbol of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, is also one of the Park's most precise and graceful hunters. Found near shore, in wetlands, or in the flowing rapids, the great blue heron is active during the day and preys primarily on fish, though they have been known to eat shrimp, crabs, insects, and rodents. Great blue herons breed in colonies, often in trees close to bodies of water. Each colony consists of between 5 and 500 nests, and are sometimes shared with other species of heron.

Fun Facts

- In Florida and the Caribbean, a white heron is found that for many years was mistakenly called the great white heron, but now is known to be a white population of great blue herons.
- Great blue herons have been known to choke to death after swallowing large fish whole.
- Great blue herons have six foot wingspan.
- The Park System boasts a colony, or 'rookery', of these birds on an island in downtown Richmond that supports up to 40 breeding pairs of birds and is visible in the early spring from Pipeline Rapids.