

Black-crowned Night Heron

Nycticorax nycticorax

Black-crowned Night-Herons are stocky birds compared to many of their long-limbed heron relatives. They're most active at night or at dusk, when you may see their ghostly forms flapping out from daytime roosts to forage in wetlands. In the light of day adults are striking in gray-and-black plumage and long white head plumes. These social birds breed in colonies of stick nests usually built over water. They live in fresh, salt, and brackish wetlands and are the most widespread heron in the world.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Black-crowned Night-Herons are small herons with rather squat, thick proportions. They have thick necks, large, flat heads, and heavy, pointed bills. The legs are short and, in flight, barely reach the end of the tail. The wings are broad and rounded.

Color Pattern

Adults are light-gray birds with a neatly defined black back and black crown. Immatures are brown with large white spots on the wings and blurry streaks on the underparts. Adults have all-black bills; immatures have yellow-and-black bills.

Behavior

Black-crowned Night-Herons often spend their days perched on tree limbs or concealed among foliage and branches. They forage in the evening and at night, in water, on mudflats, and on land. In flight they fold their head back against their shoulders, almost making the neck disappear.

Habitat

These are social birds that tend to roost and nest in groups, although they typically forage on their own. Look for them in most wetland habitats across North America, including estuaries, marshes, streams, lakes, and reservoirs.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 22.8 - 26.0 inches
- Wingspan - 45.3 - 46.5 inches
- Weight - 25.6 - 35.8 ounces

