

# Great Egret

*Ardea alba*

The elegant Great Egret is a dazzling sight in many a North American wetland. Slightly smaller and more svelte than a Great Blue Heron, these are still large birds with impressive wingspans. They hunt in classic heron fashion, standing immobile or wading through wetlands to capture fish with a deadly jab of their yellow bill. Great Egrets were hunted nearly to extinction for their plumes in the late nineteenth century, sparking conservation movements and some of the first laws to protect birds.

## Keys to Identification

### Size and Shape

Great Egrets are tall, long-legged wading birds with long, S-curved necks and long, dagger-like bills. In flight, the long neck is tucked in and the legs extend far beyond the tip of the short tail.

### Color Pattern

All feathers on Great Egrets are white. Their bills are yellowish-orange, and the legs black.

### Behavior

Great Egrets wade in shallow water (both fresh and salt) to hunt fish, frogs, and other small aquatic animals. They typically stand still and watch for unsuspecting prey to pass by. Then, with startling speed, the egrets strike with a jab of their long neck and bill.

### Habitat

You'll find Great Egrets in both freshwater and saltwater habitats. They are colonial nesters, typically placing stick nests high in trees, often on islands that are isolated from mammalian predators such as raccoons.

## Cool Facts

- Great Egrets fly slowly but powerfully: with just two wingbeats per second their cruising speed is around 25 miles an hour.
- The oldest known Great Egret was 22 years, 10 months old and was banded in Ohio.

## Measurements

### Both Sexes

- Length - 37.0 - 40.9 inches
- Wingspan - 51.6 - 57.1 inches
- Weight - 35.3 ounces (2.2 pounds)

