

Little Blue Heron

Egretta caerulea

A small, dark heron arrayed in moody blues and purples, the Little Blue Heron is a common but inconspicuous resident of marshes and estuaries in the Southeast. They stalk shallow waters for small fish and amphibians, adopting a quiet, methodical approach that can make these gorgeous herons surprisingly easy to overlook at first glance. Little Blue Herons build stick nests in trees alongside other colonial waterbirds. In the U.S., their populations have been in a gradual decline since the mid-twentieth century.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

This is a fairly small heron with a slight body, slender neck, and fairly long legs. It has rounded wings, and a long, straight, spearlike bill that is thick at the base.

Color Pattern

Adult Little Blue Herons are very dark all over. At close range or in good light, they have a rich purple-maroon head and neck and dark slaty-blue body. They have yellow eyes, greenish legs, and a bill that is pale blue at the base, black at the tip. Juveniles are entirely white, except for vague dusky tips to the outer primaries. Immatures molting into adult plumage are a patchwork of white and blue.

Behavior

The Little Blue Heron is a stand-and-wait predator, rather than a frenetic, dashing-about predator. They watch the water for fish and other small morsels, changing locations by walking slowly or by flying to a completely different site. They nest in trees, usually among other nesting herons and wading birds.

Habitat

Look for Little Blue Herons on quiet waters ranging from tidal flats and estuaries to streams, swamps, and flooded fields. They are usually found in only small numbers at any one water body, often tucked into hidden corners.

Cool Facts

- A row of built-in “teeth” along the Little Blue Heron’s middle toe serves as a grooming comb. The bird uses this handy tool to scratch its head, neck, and throat.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 22.0 - 29.1 inches
- Wingspan - 39.4 - 41.3 inches
- Weight - 10.4 - 14.5 ounces

