

GEHR Watershed Minute #24

Great Blue Heron: (223 words)

The Great Blue Heron is one of the largest natural icons of the Jersey Shore. In flight, it looks enormous, with a six-foot wingspan, slate-gray body, chestnut and black accents, and very long legs and neck.

Great Blue Herons inhabit sheltered, shallow bays and inlets, marshes, wet meadows, shores of lakes, and rivers, including the Great Egg. The primary food for the Great Blue Heron is small fish, though they are also known to eat shellfish, insects, rodents, amphibians, reptiles, and small birds. It is generally a solitary feeder.

When foraging, they stand silently along riverbanks, lake shores, or in wet meadows, waiting for prey to come by, which they then strike with their bills. They will also stalk prey slowly and deliberately. As large wading birds, Great Blue Herons are able to feed in deeper waters, giving them an advantage over other species.

Great Blue Herons usually breed in colonies containing a few to several hundred pairs. Nesting colonies are typically found in mature forests, on islands, or near mudflats, and do best when they are free of human disturbance and have foraging areas close by.

The Great Blue Heron is currently listed in New Jersey as a Species of Special Concern. Human and predator disturbance of breeding colonies along with decreasing foraging habitat are causing population decreases of this iconic bird.