

Great Blue Herons at Ivy Creek- A Little Naturalist Activity

Created for use by the Ivy Creek Foundation

When you visit Ivy Creek Natural Area, take one of the trails to the reservoir. You might see a very different kind of bird wading in the water there. This bird can be over 4 feet tall and weighs about 5 pounds. It has very long thin legs and a long neck. Its wings can span 77 to 82 inches. Unlike most birds that eat insects and seeds, this bird catches fish and frogs with its long yellow bill. This special bird is the Great Blue Heron.



The Great Blue Heron is our largest wading bird and is bluish gray in color. It patiently stands for long periods of time in shallow water to catch its food. It swallows the food whole. Great Blue Herons perch in tree tops at night. They hold their necks in an “S” shape when they fly. A Great Blue Heron is usually silent but will sometimes squawk or croak.



You see other wading birds at the coast such as Little Blue Herons and Egrets. Some herons migrate for the winter but others stay nearby all year. If you see a Great Blue Heron, be very still and watch it fish. It is something to see.



Here is a story of a little girl who sees a Great Blue Heron for the first time.

The Fishing Bird

By Carolyn Long, Illustrations by Virginia Masterston

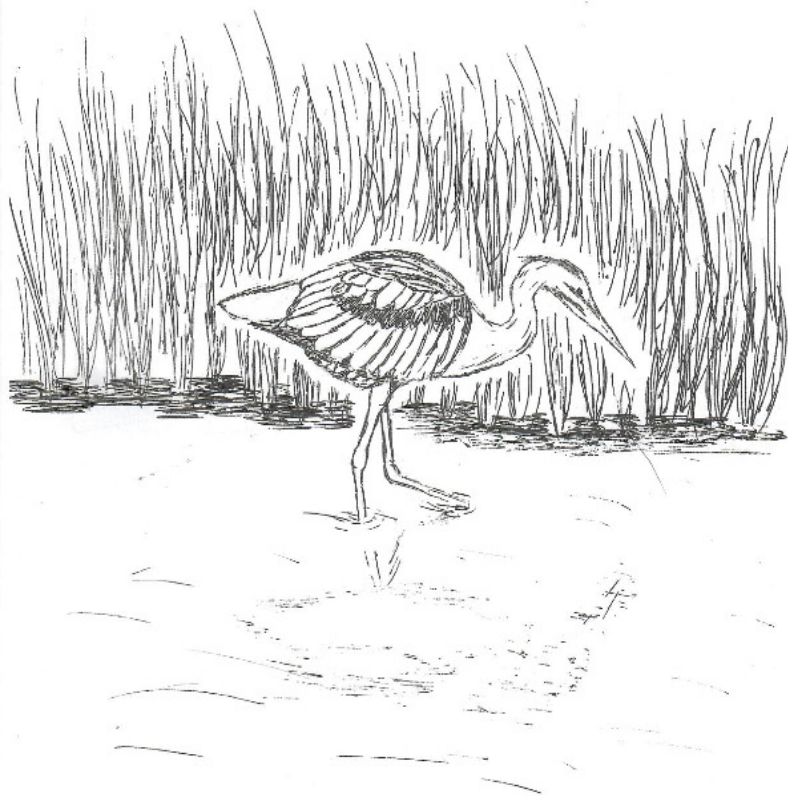
“Would you like to go to the pond?” Nora asks.

Anna loves to go anywhere with Nora. Her big sister knows everything about the outdoors.

When they get to the pond, Anna sees a different kind of bird. It has really long legs and neck and is standing in the water. It is almost as tall as she is.

“What is that bird?” she asks.

“Anna, that is a Great Blue Heron. It is fishing.”



“Birds fish?”

“Wading birds like herons fish. See, it stands very still as it watches for fish to catch.”

“I thought birds ate seeds and bugs and worms,” says Anna.

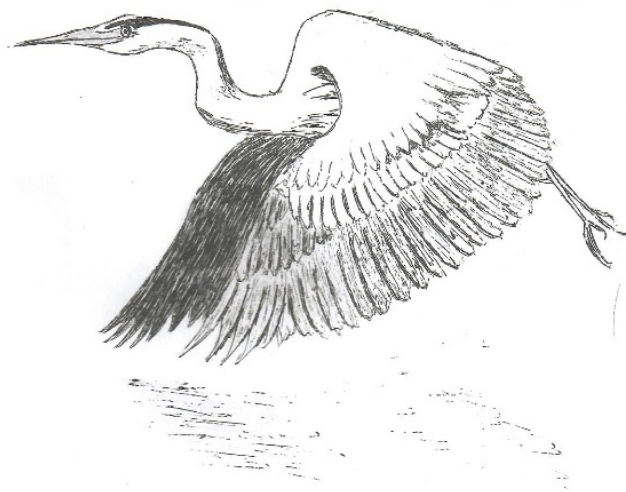
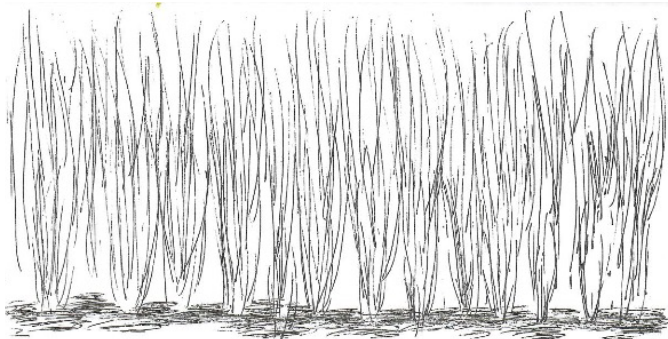
“Most birds do but herons eat fish and frogs they catch in the water. That's why their legs are so long.”

Just then, the heron strikes the water with its beak and comes up with a small fish. It swallows the fish whole.

“Wow,” says Anna. “It caught one.”

Anna gazes quietly at the heron in the water. It cocks its head from side to side while looking down for fish. Then the heron picks up its long legs and slowly walks in the water. Its feet kick up the mud. After a while, the heron stands on one leg.

Anna tries to stand on one leg, too. As she begins to fall, she yells, “Nora.”



Nora catches her just in time.

The heron hears Anna and quickly flies away. “Grawk,” it scolds.

Anna watches the great bird rise. It has the biggest wings she has ever seen. The sisters wait for the heron to return but it is gone for the day.

That night, Anna remembers how the heron caught a fish in its mouth in one movement.

“That heron bird sure can fish.”

Activities:

Make a heron by folding a white paper plate in half. This is the body of the bird. Cut out two long strips of paper for the legs. Cut out a head with a long bill and long neck. You can also cut out the legs and head from paper plates. Color or paint your bird parts and glue them together.



Books to Read:

About Birds: A Guide for Children by Cathryn Sill

Birds- National Geographic Kids Look and Learn by Ruth Musgrave

Marshes and Swamps by Gail Gibbons

Heron and Turtle by Valen Gorbachev

All books are available at the local library: jmrl.org