



## great egret

*Ardea alba*

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Aves
Order:	Ciconiformes
Family:	Ardeidae

### Features

An adult great egret is 38 to 40 inches long. Both sexes are similar in appearance. It is a tall, white bird with very long, black legs. The feathers on its body extend past the end of its tail when it is in breeding plumage. Its yellow bill is long and slender and is used as a spear for gathering food. This bird has a long neck. Like the other herons, its neck is held in an "S" formation during flight with its legs trailing straight out behind its body.

### Natural History

The great egret winters in the southern United States south to Central America. It lives around marshes, ponds, shorelines of rivers and lakes, flooded fields, and mudflats. This bird eats mainly crayfish, fish, frogs, and insects. The great egret's call is "cuk, cuk, cuk." It usually is seen wading at the water's edge. It nests in trees near the nests of black-crowned night-herons and great blue herons. Nesting in Iowa occurs from April through June. Usually, three pale blue eggs

are laid in the nest. The birds disperse after nesting. Migration occurs during the day with the birds flying in a "V" formation. Nearly all nesting colonies are along the Mississippi River.

### Habitats

interior rivers and streams; Mississippi River; Missouri River

### Iowa Status

uncommon; native

### Iowa Range

summer: statewide; migrant: statewide

### Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.