

far flowing water



Grand Haven, Michigan

Volume 17 ❖ Number 2 October, 2006

October 17

7:30 P.M.

Mike Hayes, Vice President, Programs

COO, COO,
COO

Vote
NO ON PROPOSAL 3

COO, COO, COO
Mourning Dove's this year fledged young as late as September 27 in our yard.



All are welcome to our free

Over 29,415 people have visited the OIAS homepage at <http://www.macatawa.org/~oias>

United Methodist Church of the Dunes
717 Sheldon, Grand Haven, MI

Great Egret

Casmerodius albus

By Judi Manning

The Great Egret is a large, slender, long-necked, white wading heron. During migration they can be seen in many places, from drainage ditches and ponds, to lakeshores and marshes. In the Old World they are the largest egret. In the Americas, the largest is the white form of the Great Blue Heron. This species is very abundant in most areas.

Attached to the all white body, are long black legs and feet. They stand 3 feet high, weigh about 35 ounces, with a 55 inch wingspan and make them easily seen. The long, yellow, stout, straight bill has a dark top edge. There is no crest or plumes on the head. The male is slightly larger than the female. They have a slow flight and hold their neck retracted in an "S" curve. The neck is longer than the body.

By day they usually feed alone or in mixed flocks in the shallow water in marshes, swamps, streams, rivers, ponds, lakes, tide flats, canals, mudflats, and flooded fields. They prefer fish, but will also eat amphibians (frogs), aquatic invertebrates (insects, crayfish), reptiles (snakes), crickets, grasshoppers, and many other insects. During the drier months, they will stalk small mammals (moles, mice), snails, and nesting birds. If they stand still, studies show they can ingest more intermediate size prey (high quality food) than if they moved catching a larger quantity of lesser quality food.

Very skilled hunters, they stalk food by wading slowly through the water with the strong neck coiled. When they spy something, they quickly straighten their neck and snatch prey by stabbing it with the bill. You may see them tilt their head to one side, possibly to avoid glare on the water. They use their feet to stir up the water and scare up the prey. However, they prefer to steal a higher percentage of food from smaller herons. Their feet are not webbed, but their weight is distributed over large feet so they do not sink in the mud. Dusk finds them gathering together to form communal roosts.

During breeding they have long, lacy feather plumes extending from the back to beyond the tail used in courtship displays around the nest. They breed in isolated areas in southern Canada and northern U.S. According to the Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas, they breed in the south one-half of the Lower Peninsula.

They nest in rookeries with the Black-crowned Night-heron and Great Blue Heron in shrubs and trees over water, and on islands. The male picks the nesting site and begins the nest building in medium-sized trees 20 to 30 feet above ground. He then brings the female the nesting materials consisting of small twigs, stems, and sticks. The nest is sometimes lined with softer plant materials. She completes building the fragile, bulky nest. Nests are also built one to two feet above the water in bushes or cattails.

Three to five pale blue-green eggs are incubated by both parents for 23 to 26 days. If any of the first eggs are damaged, she will lay replacement eggs. Great Egrets are very territorial. Both parents aggressively defend the nesting site by squawking harshly, leaping at or jabbing their beak at the intruder.

Both parents care for the young, feeding them first by regurgitation. Next they feed by bill grabbing. The parents hold prey over the nestling to grab at as it eats. They feed the young frogs, fish, and snakes. The parents let the chicks squabble over food. Larger chicks often kill their smaller siblings. If there is an insufficient food supply, the strongest, first hatched have a better chance of surviving.

After three weeks, the young leave the nest and walk on the nearby branches returning to the nest for food. The young chicks also climb out of the nest. On the branches make them easy prey for predatory crows, vultures, and raccoons. A week later the birds are fed away from the nest. Few chicks survive to fledge in 35 to 40 days. They reach maturity in two years and can live for 15 years in the wild. They are seasonally monogamous.



If disturbed, you will hear a deep croak or harsh, low “carr”. They have other calls around the nest. During the summer they wander far north of the breeding area.

The mostly helpless, hatched nestlings are covered in long, white down with silky tips and pink bills. They hold the head up just after hatching. After three weeks, the young chicks leave the nest and walk on the nearby branches and return to the nest for food.

The northern hemisphere birds move south in winter and are found south of a line from Oregon to New Jersey as far south as Colombia and along rivers in the southwestern U.S. The adults have no non-human predators. They do affect the populations of their prey.

Similar species infrequently occurring in Michigan: (1) the Cattle Egret is shorter and stockier with a reddish wash over the head, back, and chest, and has a shorter, stubbier yellow bill with black legs; (2) the Snowy Egret is also smaller, has a black bill and yellow feet; (3) the white juvenile Little Blue Heron, is smaller, has a dark bill with a bluish base and greenish legs; (4) in southern Florida the white morph of the Great Blue Heron has a heavier bill with pale, not black, legs; and (5) the white form of the Reddish Egret has a dark or bi-colored bill.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, plume hunters reduced the North American population by more than 95%. The plumes were used to decorate hats. They recovered after protected by law in most U.S. locations. However, they are threatened in Connecticut due to a loss of breeding habitat.

They have been known as “American Egret”, “Common Egret”, “White Egret”, “Great White Egret”, and “Great White Heron”. They now are known as “Great Egret”.

They are common along the coasts from Maine and southern Canada west to the Great Lakes, south to Texas, the Gulf Coast states, Florida, and along the Atlantic Coast and throughout the American tropics to southern Argentina.

Subspecies *A.a. egretta* is found in North America.

Subspecies *A.a. modesta* is found in Asia and Australia.

Subspecies *A.a. alba* is found in southern Europe.

Subspecies *A.a. melanorhynchos* is found in Africa.

THREATS to Great Egrets:

Destruction of wetlands, pose a major threat to these birds. This species is vulnerable to the loss of wetland habitat (draining, pollution, drought, and floods) and is declining in the southern United States.

Disturbance of rookeries, by people or predators, has a negative impact on the breeding population. Development of coastal areas prevents populations from returning to previous levels.

Water pollution.

Hydrocarbons are especially problematic because they cause great egrets to lay thinner eggs that are more susceptible to cracking or damage before the young hatch.¹

Mercury has been found at high levels in the feathers of numerous avian species including great egrets. The amount of mercury found depends on age, sex, geographic location, and mercury concentrations in the habitat around them including the air, soil and organisms they consumer. These contaminations have also been found to negatively affect behavior, physiology, and reproduction.¹

They are also killed as pests on fish farms and the nests are raided for eggs.

Recently, they are in demand for their feathers in South America, which may threaten them again.

It is endangered in New Zealand.

References:

<http://www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/Infocenter>; http://www.birds.cornell.edu/AllAboutBirds/BirdGuide/Great_Egret; http://www.enature.com/flashcard/show_flash_card.asp?recordNumber=BD0106; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kotuku>; <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/birds/printouts/Greategretprintout.shtml>; http://www.naturia.per.sg/buloh/birds/Egretta_alba.htm; <http://dep.state.ct.us/burnatr/Wildlife/pdf/gegret.pdf>; <http://www.nhptv.org/Natureworks/greategret.htm>; ¹Jones, J. 2002. "Ardea alba" (On-line), Animal Diversity Web. Accessed September 19, 2006 at http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Ardea_alba.html.

A cougar by any other name

... is a puma, mountain lion, catamount, painter or panther, depending on its geographic locale. Biologists call this animal *Puma (Felis) concolor*, meaning "cat of one color". As the most widely distributed cat in the Americas, cougars are at home in many environments - from deserts, swamps, forests and tropical jungles to foothills and rugged mountains. Once found through most of North and South America, these cats--have a much more limited range today with most of the U.S. population now only found in 11 western states. A small population (30-50 individuals) of the Florida panther, a subspecies, maintains a tenuous existence in that state.

An adult cougar has a body length of about 5 feet with a 2-3 foot tail. It can weigh 80-200 pounds; those living in cold climates tend to be larger than those in warmer areas. While the cougar resembles an African lioness, its closest relative is actually the jaguarundi, a small cat native to Central and South America. Scientists think that both cats descended from an ancestral puma that emigrated from Asia via the Bering land bridge thousands of years ago. The cougar is a "transition" cat with characteristics of both large and small cats. Most notable is this feline's inability to roar. Big cats like lions and tigers have an elastic hyoid bone in their throat that allows the larynx to expand and produce a roaring sound. Cougars have a hardened hyoid bone, like small cats, but can produce chirps, snarls, hisses, growls, yowls, purrs and even screams.

Cougars are generally solitary animals, although the territory of a male might overlap the territories of several females. They are crepuscular (dawn/dusk) hunters but can be active at any time of day or night. Their primary need is a large wilderness area with an adequate food supply. While rabbits, ground squirrels, beaver, wild pigs, turkeys, skunks and even porcupines will do for a small meal, the cougar's main food is deer. But these cats will occasionally attack livestock when their natural prey is sparse. When stalking and attacking its prey, the puma makes good use of its jumping abilities, with running long jumps that can exceed 45 feet and vertical leaps of up to 15 feet.

These cats pair up for only a few weeks each year to mate. A den located in a crevice, cave or possibly a dense thicket serves as the birth place for a litter of 2-6 cubs. They are born with dark spots dappled on a lighter coat; the spots fade after about 6 months. The cubs are also born with blue eyes, which will eventually change to a green-gold color. The young cats remain with their mother until they are almost two years old, then leave to look for and establish their own individual territory. Cougars usually live 10-12 years in the wild, but can live up to 21 years.

Because these cats are normally secretive and shun humans, it is difficult to know how many are left (in the wild) today. Increased land development and habitat fragmentation have reduced their U.S. range. While the Florida panther is listed as an endangered species, cougars are considered big game to be trapped or shot in some western states. As available habitat becomes more limited and fewer corridors are available to link remaining wild lands, human encounters with these cats may increase and cause problems to the detriment of both humans and the cats. But public support for saving mountain lions and their habitat seems to be increasing in North America as people learn to appreciate the essential role these cats play as top predators in our ecosystem.

Submitted by Pam Key; Published in Zoo Doings, John Ball Park Zoo, July/August 2006; Sources stated at end of article: <http://www.mountain/ion.org/indexl.asp> <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/agarmanljundi.htm>

FAR FLOWING WATER

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Christmas Bird Count

December 16

Contract
Fred Bevis
if you can
help count.
616-895-6127



Dues are past due

Complete the Membership Renewal/
Application and mail to Cal or bring
to the meeting.

Backyard Bird Count—10th Annual February 16—19, 2007

"New York, NY & Ithaca, NY, March 9, 2006—The ninth annual Great Backyard Bird Count, which took place February 17–20, set new records as participation soared across the United States and Canada. From backyards to wildlife refuges, bird watchers tallied a record-breaking **623 bird species** and **7.5 million individual birds** during the four-day event, coordinated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society. Participants sent in more than **60,000 checklists**, providing a wealth of information unmatched in previous years.

The flood of reports yielded what would have been otherwise impossible—a comprehensive snapshot of the continent’s birdlife. “With more people watching birds, together we discovered amazing things,” said Paul Green, director of Citizen Science for National Audubon Society. “In some places, observers described flocks of robins so large their combined calls were louder than jetliners, and good seed crops in northwest Canada caused several species of seedeaters to remain in sub-zero northern Canada rather than move to warmer areas further south.”

2006 Great Backyard Bird Count ranks as the second-highest ever in participation, up 15 percent compared with last year and up a whopping 40 percent from two years ago. Three Canadian provinces and fifteen states set new records for checklists submitted.

OVERALL STATISTICS:

- Checklists submitted: 60,608
- Checklists accepted: 60,151 (record is 61,049 in 2000)
- Species: 623 ***record** (previous record: 612 in 2005)
- Individual birds: 7,586,047 ***record** (previous record: 6,546, 606 in 2005)
- U.S. checklists: 57,082, up 7,628 from last year, an increase of 15 percent
- Canada checklists: 3,069, up 257 from last year, an increase of 9 percent
- U.S./Canada total: 60,151, up 7,885 from last year, an increase of 15 percent"



<http://www.birdsource.org/gbbc/press/news-stories/record-breaker>

2006-2007 OIAS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL / APPLICATION

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Phone _____ How did you hear about OIAS? _____

Check Member Type: \$8 Individual \$12 Family
 \$100 Individual Life \$15 \$20 \$30 Contributing



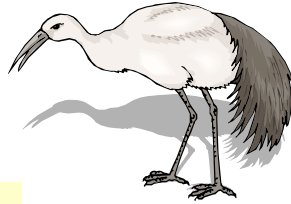
Make checks payable to: OIAS, c/o Cal Pomarius, 14618 Indian Trails Dr.,
Grand Haven, Michigan, 49417

10/06 count

North American Migration Count: May 12, 2007



Join others around the U.S. to document the number of birds and where they are.



CraneFest XII

Saturday and Sunday
October 14 and 15, 2006
12 noon - 7 pm

Bernard W. Baker Sanctuary,
Calhoun County, Michigan,
2,000 (October) - 5,000+ (Late October thru mid November)

<http://www.michiganaudubon.org/bakersanctuary/cranefest.html>

Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society
c/o Judi Manning, Editor
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PLEASE FORWARD
ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

**VOTE NO ON
PROPOSAL 3**