

GREAT BLUE HERON

(Ardea herodias)

**Oneida Lake Status:
Common**



Great blue heron in the wild



Great blue herons boast a large wingspan when flying



Wading through water, searching for a meal

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- Largest heron in North America
- Often found in shallow water looking for food
- Strongly affected by human contact

The great blue heron is the largest heron in North America, with a wingspan as large as 84 inches and weighing up to 7 pounds. Adults have bluish gray wings and white heads decorated by a black streak above the eye. They have long necks streaked with white, brown, and black, and a long yellow beak that tapers to a point. Heron legs are long, thin, and greenish-yellow in color.

Great blue herons can be found in marshes and swamps (including Cicero Swamp), flooded meadows, and along Oneida Lake's shallow water shoreline, but they always live near water. Herons forage while standing in water, and are most active around dawn and dusk. They locate their food by sight, and spear prey with their long, sharp bill. Using this method, herons eat fish, frogs, insects, snakes, turtles, rodents and small birds. Herons swallow their prey whole, and have been known to choke on prey that is too large.



*Note the distinctive bill, and "S" shaped neck
(www.sfwmd.gov/org/erd/krr)*

Great blue herons nest in trees and bushes, where they build bulky stick nests. Often, they will form colonies with other heron species. When driving on NYS Route 298 through Cicero Swamp, heron nests can be spotted in the trees on the east side of the road. Great blue heron's reproduction is negatively affected by human disturbance, and repeated intrusion into nesting areas often results in the abandonment of eggs and chicks. This almost certainly leads to nest failure.