

Great Blue Heron Nest Camera FAQ

Question: Where is the nest that I am viewing located?

Answer: You are watching a live camera on the Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin. This particular spot is Fourmile Island, located in the southeast portion of the Horicon Marsh State Wildlife Area. You may visit the Horicon Marsh Education Center to see the nesting platforms from our viewing windows!



Question: Why is the nest on a man-made platform?

Answer: Typically, Great Blue Herons like to nest in trees. Unfortunately for them, their guano piled up and destroyed their own habitat. Then, in the 1990's a wind storm further devastated the trees used for nesting on the island. In 1992-1993, in an effort to assist the birds, the WI DNR then erected nesting platforms on utility poles that range from 40 to 60 feet high which you are seeing them nest on today! There appear to be about 200 active nests on the island this year!

Question: What is the typical diet of the GBH?

Answer: The Great Blue Heron will eat nearly anything with striking distance including fish, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, insects and even mammals! We have observed a GBH dining on a small muskrat. GBH's swallow their food whole and sometimes run the risk of choking to death on too large of prey!

Question: Do Great Blue Herons mate for life?

Answer: Not exactly. These birds are usually monogamous for one breeding season and they very well may choose another mate the following year.

Question: How many eggs will each heron lay?

Answer: A typical nest will consist of 2-6 eggs. The eggs are laid in 2 day intervals. The male and female will take turns incubating the eggs and protecting their nest. Eggs can be left without incubation for approximately 6 minutes each hour, depending on the weather.

Question: How long will it take for the eggs to hatch?

Answer: The eggs will be incubated for approximately 27-29 days. The first chicks to hatch will be more experienced in food "handling" and therefore may grow quicker and be more aggressive.

Question: How do the parents feed the chicks?

Answer: Both parents take turns feeding the young by regurgitating food. The parent birds will have to consume up to four times as much food while they are feeding their young! After the chicks fledge, they will continue to return to their nest to be fed by their parents for another three weeks.

Question: How long before the heron chicks fledge?

Answer: After about 55 days the chicks will take their first flight from the nest. We will be recording all of our significant dates on a fact sheet, which will be available to read after this nesting season.

Question: What are the blinking lights in the background?

Answer: Those are wind turbines.

Cool Heron Facts:

The oldest heron on record was 24 years old based on banding data. However, 69% of all young herons do not survive their first year. Of those that do, most will live to be about 15 yrs old.

The average heron wingspan is a whopping 65" – 80"!

A heron will only weigh about 4-7#. While they look to be much larger, their bones are hollow to enable flight.

Heron maintain an average flying speed of 20-30 mph.