

Snowy Egret

Classification:

Egretta thula

Common names:

Snowy Egret,
Common Egret,
Lesser Egret,
Little Snowy

Habitat and

Distribution:

Inhabits shores of lakes or ponds, marshes, swamps, mud flats, and tidal shallows.

Occurs in most southern areas all year. In the winter it's most common in southern Florida and Louisiana. It winters as far south as the northern part of South America.

Description:

Size: 20-27 inches tall with up to a 40-inch wingspan. Weighs about 13 ounces.

Color: White overall; lores (area between eyes and bill) are yellow. Has a slender black bill and black legs with bright yellow feet.

Immature Color: Has yellow extending up from foot to the back of legs and has bright yellow facial skin.

Breeding Characteristics: Lores are red, feet are orange, and long plumes on the neck, head, and back curve upwards.

Reproduction:

During courtship, males erect their plumes, stretch their necks, point bill skyward and call. Colonial Nesting is common and will nest with other wading birds.

Nests are constructed with twigs and sticks and are usually built in trees or shrubs over water 10-20 feet above ground.



Cattle Egret

Classification:

Bubulcus ibis

Common names:

Cattle Egret, Bluff
Backed Heron

Habitat and

Distribution:

Inhabits grassy areas, marshes and along edges of ponds, also common in cattle pastures.

Description:

Size: About 18-21 inches long with a 36-inch wingspan. Weighs between 9.5-18 ounces.

Color: White with short yellow bill and yellow legs and feet.

Immature Color: Has black legs and bill. Black bill turns pale yellow by early fall.

Breeding Characteristics: Has legs and a bill that range from orange to bright red, a reddish eye, purple lores and pale orange feathers on top of head, lower neck and back.

Reproduction:

During courtship, males claim territory before mating begins. They will go through a variety of displays to attract females. Females will gather in their territory and sometimes jump on the males back. Eventually the male will evict all but 1 female.

Colonial nesting is common and a single colony can have thousands of birds.

Nests are constructed of twigs and are built 3-30 feet above ground in a tree or shrub.



Snowy Egret

Breeding:

Begins in mid-January, peaks in April and May, and extends through July. Females lay 3-5 light blue-green eggs that are incubated by both adults for 20-29 days. Young leave nest in about 1 month.

Feeding:

Snowy egrets forage in mostly shallow water, eating crustaceans, mollusks, fish and small vertebrates. They will remain motionless and wait for prey or shuffle feet to stir up prey.

How to distinguish from a cattle egret:

- Larger than a cattle egret,
- During breeding, lores are red,
- Black bill and legs, but yellow feet, and
- Slender bill.

Interesting Facts:

- Driven to near extinction due to over hunting for their plumage during breeding season for women's hats.
- Asynchronous hatching often leads to starvation of the smallest chicks.
- Has the most diverse foraging techniques of any heron. Occasionally, will follow Glossy Ibis and capture food that it stirs up.

Additional Reading:

museum.nhm.uga.edu/gawildlife/gaww.html
www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov

Cattle Egret

Breeding:

Begins in early April and extends until late July with a peak in June. Females lay 3-4 light blue-green eggs that both adults incubate for 20-29 days. Young are cared for up to 45 days, after which they are independent.

Feeding:

Cattle egrets feed on insects (ex. grasshoppers, crickets, spiders, etc.). Birds can be seen following livestock and farm equipment to catch insects that are disturbed. They also sit on the backs of cows looking for ticks and flies.

How to distinguish from a snowy egret:

- Smaller than snowy egret,
- During breeding, lores are purple,
- Bill, legs, and feet are yellow, and
- Short, thick, pointed bill.

Interesting facts:

- The cattle egret was introduced to South America in 1880 from Africa. They were first seen in Florida in 1942 and found nesting in 1950's.
- Their range has increased because of increasing deforestation of wetlands and cattle farming.
- Tucks neck in close to body during flight and at rest and rarely ever extends it.

Additional Reading:

www.stanfordalumni.org/birdsite/
www.nhptv.org/natureworks/cattleegret.htm