

TECHNICAL NOTES

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE WYOMING SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

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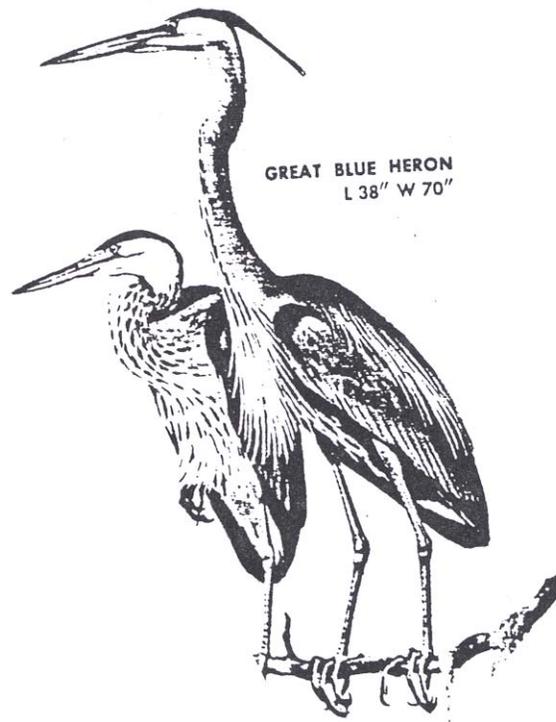
Subject: GREAT BLUE HERON*

General

Great blue herons (*Ardea herodias*) are long-legged wading birds that feed mainly on aquatic life. They are common in Colorado along streams and the shores of larger reservoirs.

Food Requirements

Important foods of the great blue heron include fish (68%), crustaceans (8%), insects (8%), mice and shrews (5%), and herptiles (4%). Most prey is captured in or near shallow water. The most common hunting sites in tidal areas were in water 6 to 12 in (15.2-30.5 cm) deep.



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*Information taken from Ecoregion M3113 Handbook and Habitat Suitability Index Models, Wildlife Species Narratives (literature searches), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, various dates between 1978-1984.

Water Requirements

No specific drinking water requirements were found in the literature.

Cover Requirements

Vegetation occurring in and along the shallow waters and shores of lakes, ponds, reservoirs, marshes, and streams fulfill most cover requirements.

Reproductive Requirements

Nests are built in trees, on the ground, or on rock ledges. In western North America, most nests are in cottonwood (Populus spp.) or boxelder (Acer negundo) trees. Herons prefer to nest near the water. Trees greater than 20 or 30 ft (6.1 to 9.1 m) in height, emerging from the water or on islands, provide the best nesting sites. The nest is constructed of sticks less than ½ inch (1.3 cm) in diameter and the availability of suitable sticks may be a limiting factor.

Special Habitat Requirements

No special requirements were found in the literature.

Interspersion Requirements

Value of habitat for great blue herons increases if there is at least some interspersion with cultivated land or sage-grassland. Breeding territory size varies according to the structure and spacing of nesting trees.

Special Considerations

Extended periods of reservoir drawdown and the cutting of riparian woodlots adversely affect heron populations.

Optimal nesting habitat has no human disturbance within 0.75 mile (1.2 km). Repeated disturbance at the nest site usually results in near abandonment. Wind causes many nesting mortalities.