



**Natural Heritage  
& Endangered Species  
Program**

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*Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife*

**Snowy Egret  
*Egretta thula***

State Status: **None**  
Federal Status: **None**

**SPECIES DESCRIPTION:** A medium-sized white heron, the Snowy Egret is 20 to 27 inches in length, with a slender black bill, black legs, and yellow feet. It has white plumes on the neck, back, and breast during breeding. The voice is a low croak.

**DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE:** The Snow Egret was considered a rare vagrant from the south until the late 1940s. Its breeding range has expanded northward into Massachusetts during the last 50 years; the first reported nesting in Massachusetts was in 1955 in Dennis. Snowy Egrets nest colonially on coastal islands. The last comprehensive census in Massachusetts (1994-95) reported 608 nesting pairs at 10 colonies.

**HABITAT DESCRIPTION:** Snowy Egrets nest in mixed colonies with other species of egrets and herons. The nests are in trees or patches of shrubs on coastal islands, presumably to reduce the likelihood of mammalian predation. Snowy Egrets forage in marshes and ponds near their breeding colonies for small fish, snails, and aquatic invertebrates.

**THREATS:** Predation and human disturbance at nesting colonies are threats to Snowy Egrets in Massachusetts. Loss of nesting trees due to storm damage, physical deterioration caused by years of exposure to bird excrement, or human cutting and clearing may also be threats; these will certainly cause breeding populations to relocate.

**REFERENCES:**

- Sauer, J.R., J.E. Hines, and J. Fallon. 2004. *The North American Breeding Bird Survey, Results and Analysis 1966 - 2003*. Version 2004.1. USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, Laurel, Maryland.
- Smallwood, J. A., and D. M. Bird. 2002. American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*). In *The Birds of North America*, No. 602 (A. Poole and F. Gill, eds.). Philadelphia, PA.
- Veit, R., and W.R. Petersen. 1993. *Birds of Massachusetts*. Massachusetts Audubon Society, Lincoln, Massachusetts.

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***A Species of Greatest Conservation Need in the Massachusetts State Wildlife Action Plan***

**Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife**

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Please allow the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program to continue to conserve the biodiversity of Massachusetts with a contribution for 'endangered wildlife conservation' on your state income tax form, as these donations comprise a significant portion of our operating budget.

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