



**Natural Heritage
& Endangered Species
Program**

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Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife

**Great Egret
*Ardea alba***

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

SPECIES DESCRIPTION: The largest North American egret, the Great Egret has a pure white plumage, a wing span of over four feet, black legs and feet, long neck, and a large, yellow bill. These characteristics make it easily recognizable.



Photo by Dick Daniels/carolinabirds.org

fish and may be seen foraging in a broad variety of wetland types and even flooded fields.

THREATS: Feeding at fish-rearing facilities increases exposure to illegal shooting, while use of agricultural fields and drainage ditches make them susceptible to pesticides and heavy metal contamination. Feeding in natural wetlands downstream of agricultural fields and sewage treatment plants may also expose egrets to a variety of toxins.

REFERENCES:

- Mccrimmon, D.A., Jr., J.C. Ogden, and G.T. Bancroft. 2011. Great Egret (*Ardea alba*), The Birds of North America Online (A. Poole, Ed.). Ithaca: Cornell Lab of Ornithology.
- Walsh, J., and W.R. Petersen. 2013. *Massachusetts Breeding Bird Atlas 2*. Massachusetts Audubon Society and Scott & Nix, Inc.

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE: The core of the Great Egret's breeding range is coastal areas of the southeastern United States, but they have been expanding north in recent decades. In Massachusetts, it continues to increase in numbers and expand its range. They breed within coastal heron rookeries and expansion has been particularly pronounced in the Boston Basin and Coastal Plains.

HABITAT DESCRIPTION: This species primarily nests in woody vegetation, and stick nests are generally placed high in trees. They can use a variety of different habitats for nesting including islands, lakes, freshwater wetlands, and marine-estuarine habitats. They feed on

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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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