



The Grey Heron

It is quite likely that if someone points out a grey heron to you, you will remember it the next time you see it. The grey heron is a tall bird, usually about 80cm to 1m in height and is common to inland waterways and coasts. Though the grey heron has a loud “fraank” call, it can most often be seen standing silently in shallow water with its long neck outstretched, watching the water for any sign of movement. The grey heron is usually found on its own, although some may feed close together.

Their main food is fish, but they will take small mammals, insects, frogs and even young birds. Because of their habit of occasionally taking young birds, herons are not always popular and are often driven away from a feeding area by intensive mobbing. Mobbing is when smaller birds fly aggressively at their predator, in this case the heron, in order to defend their nests or their lives.

Like all herons, grey herons breed in a colony called a heronry. They mostly nest in tall trees and bushes, but sometimes they nest on the ground or on ledge of rock by the sea. Nesting starts in February, when the birds perform elaborate displays and make noisy callings. They lay between 3-5 greenish-blue eggs, often stained white by the birds’ droppings. Once hatched, the young make continuous squawking noises as they wait to be fed by their parents. And though it doesn’t sound too pleasant, the parent swallows the food and brings it up again at the nest, where the young put their bills right inside their parents mouth in order to retrieve it!

In flight, herons bend their necks into an “S” shape, as do bitterns (who are part of the heron family). This tells them apart from storks, cranes and spoonbills who fly with their necks extended.

Latin Name: Ardea cinerea

Irish Name: Corr réisc

Colour: Grey back, white head and neck, with a black crest on head. Black shoulders and yellow bill.

Length: 84-102 cm

Diet: Fish, frogs, insects, worms & birds.

Habitat: Coasts, estuaries, lakes and rivers.

No. of eggs: 3-5

The Little Egret

One of the relatives of the grey heron is the little egret. It is smaller than the grey heron, standing approximately 50 cm in height. It has snow white feathers, a black beak, long black legs and striking yellow feet. The little egret was once a migratory bird, spending the winters in the warmer climates of Africa and Asia. Now, however, there are more and more records of little egrets breeding in Ireland.



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