



What is HERON?

"HERON" is short for the Heron Observation Network, a network of volunteers across Maine who monitor nesting areas, or colonies, of wading birds such as the great blue heron. HERON is managed by the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

These volunteers have "adopted" colonies and in doing so, visit them 1-5 times during the breeding season (May-Aug) to determine if a colony is active and the number of active nests.

Data collected by HERON volunteers will be used to assess the breeding populations of these birds over time, identify and prioritize ecologically important areas, and inform environmental review and landscape planning activities.

What is a colonial wading bird?

Colonial wading birds are medium to large birds with long legs, necks and bills - features specially adapted for capturing prey while wading in shallow water.

Colonial wading birds nest in groups. These colonies can contain a few pairs to several hundred; often multiple nests occupy the same tree.

In Maine, we have several species of colonial wading birds (listed here from most abundant to least): great blue heron, snowy egret, glossy ibis, black-crowned night-heron, great egret, little blue heron, tricolored heron, and cattle egret.



Great blue herons (E. R. Campbell).



Great blue heron (J. Mays), snowy egret (D. Albert), glossy ibis (B. Allen), black-crowned night-heron (D. D'Auria), and great egret (J. Mays).

Why should we be concerned about colonial wading birds?

Colonial wading birds are important predators that feed near the top of the food chain on a wide variety of fish and aquatic invertebrates. They are also relatively long-lived, making them good indicators of environmental quality, including wetland health, levels of toxic substances, and levels of human disturbance.

Nesting in colonies helps in terms of predator avoidance, but it also makes these birds especially vulnerable to habitat loss. Impacts to a small area (colony) can affect hundreds of breeding pairs of several different species.

Maine's coastal breeding population of great blue herons has experienced a steady downward trend from 1,208 pairs in 1983 to just 430 pairs in 2009. The statewide breeding population also shows evidence of decline, but its extent is unknown and warrants closer monitoring.

The black-crowned night-heron has also experienced a decline in Maine over the past 30-40 years. Its limited nesting distribution and small population warranted its designation as an Endangered species under the Maine Endangered Species Act in 2015.

For more information, or to report a wading bird colony, please contact:



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Learn more at mefishwildlife.com/heron-network