



Wildlife Window: Egrets

Beautiful Great White Egrets are Common in Rivendell.

By the Rivendell Ponds & Preserves Committee

[Woodlands Word – December 2021]

10.31.21

December conjures up images of snowy winters and holidays. Many of us moved here to avoid winters, but we can all enjoy the **Great White Egrets**, with their snow-colored white plumage, that frequent Rivendell ponds. Keeping our ponds healthy attracts these beautiful birds. Plus, there are other Egret species in Florida, including the **Cattle Egret** and the **Snowy Egret**, although not likely seen in Rivendell.

Similar to Herons, Egrets are members of a small family of birds known as the *Ardeidae*. These “waterbirds” (fresh and salt water) are long-legged, long-necked and generally long-billed birds. Let’s learn more about the different Egrets, along with an Egret look-alike that’s really a Heron. (*Spoiler alert.*)



Great White Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Great White Egrets are tall, long-legged wading birds with long, S-curved necks and long, dagger-like bills. In flight, the long neck is tucked in, legs extend far beyond the tip of the short tail.

Size & Color: Large, about 37-40” long, a wingspan of 50-57” (smaller than Great Blue Herons, larger than Snowy Egrets). These waterbirds have white feathers, and their long bills are yellowish-orange, with black legs.



Feeding & Habitat: Great White Egrets are carnivores and wade in shallow water to hunt fish, frogs, and other small aquatic animals. They typically stand still and watch for unsuspecting prey to pass by. Then, with startling speed, egrets strike with a jab of their long neck and bill, capturing their prey.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Size & Color: The short, thick-necked, stocky Cattle Egret spends most of its time in fields. This medium-sized egret has a short yellow bill and yellow legs. It is often seen perched with its thick neck tucked in.

Feeding & Habitat: Cattle Egrets are tropical, found in agricultural areas near wetlands. They forage at the feet of grazing cattle, heads bobbing with each step, or ride on cattle backs to pick at ticks.



Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)

Size & Color: The medium-sized, slender Snowy Egret sets off immaculate white plumage with black legs and brilliant yellow feet.

Feeding & Habitat: Snowy Egrets are found by the coast, especially in places with mudflats and tidal wetlands. They eat mostly aquatic animals, including fish, frogs, worms, crustaceans, and insects. They use their bright yellow feet to paddle in the water or probe in the mud, rounding up prey before striking with its bill.

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Juvenile Little Blue Herons are often mistaken for Snowy Egrets, which have an all-black bill and black legs compared with the grayish bill and greenish-yellow legs of Little Blues. By contrast, Snowy Egrets lack the vague dusky primary-feather tips of juvenile Little Blues.

Feeding & Habitat: The Little Blue Heron is a patient stalker, with a distinctive posture – it walks with its neck stretched awkwardly up and forward, while the bill is pointed down at the water. Little Blues can often be seen quietly working the grassy edges of a pond - while numbers of Snowy Egrets forage together in the more open water.



(Bob Frank photos)