

# Learn about: Grey Heron



As Gaeilge: Corr réisc

Scientific name: *Ardea cinerea*

## What is it?

The Grey Heron is a large wading bird, it's very common throughout Ireland and is found throughout Europe, Africa and western Asia.



## What does it look like?

The heron is a large bird – about 1m in length with a wingspan of up to 2m. It has long legs for wading in shallow water, a long neck and a long sharp yellowish beak. Its feathers are mostly grey on the back and wings, with a white neck and breast. It has a black stripe over its yellow eye, and the black feathers hang back behind its head. The heron makes a harsh croaking sound “frraaak!”.



## Where does it live?

Hérons are common and widespread throughout Ireland. They are found at estuaries, lakes, rivers and canals, and can be found in cities as well as in the countryside. You will often see herons



standing extremely still at the water's edge, either with their neck stretched out long if they are hunting or hunched up if they are resting. Like a lot of birds, heron often stand on one leg.

Hérons build big nests at the top of trees in springtime, they nest with other heron couples in groups called "heronries". In April, the female heron will lay 3 – 5 blueish green eggs in the nest.

Both parents will take turns incubating the eggs (keeping them warm) for about 3½ weeks until they hatch. The chicks stay in the nest until



they are about eight weeks old. Herons usually live to be about five years old.



*Fact: In ancient Egypt, herons were depicted as messengers from the Gods.*

## What does it eat?

Hérons feed on fish, frogs, newts, insects, small mammals like mice and voles, and even ducklings! Herons are excellent hunters and they do so by standing very still so that their prey doesn't notice them, when the prey is close enough they strike very quickly with their long neck and sharp beak.



## Threats:

Hérons are common birds, but they are impacted by habitat loss - especially through water pollution. Litter is also a threat for herons as they may swallow it and choke or injure themselves.

## Links:

Check out the RSPB grey heron fact page and listen to a heron's call:

<https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/grey-heron/>

Have a look at a grey heron nesting in Galway, with this great clip from Crossing the Line and BirdWatch Ireland:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iR8-rGW27Y>

Have you seen a heron recently? You can submit your sighting to the National Biodiversity Data Centre here and help them keep track of Ireland's wildlife!

<https://records.biodiversityireland.ie/start-recording>

## Your Turn!

### Origami Heron

Watch [this video](#) from *Origami How To* and learn how to make your own origami paper heron!



All you need is a sheet of coloured card, and maybe some help from an adult. If you make one, we would love to see it! Ask an adult to take a photo of your creation and post it to social media @GreenSchoolsIre #GreenSchoolsStayHome

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x2Kp9aCAM1Y>

### Quick Quiz:

- What's the Irish name for heron?
- How many eggs does a female heron lay?
- What do you call a group of nesting herons?
- How long do herons usually live for?
- What kind of food does a heron eat?



If you're stuck for an answer, read back over the fact sheet!