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Front Cover: GRAY HERON (*Ardea cinerea*)

The **Gray Heron** is a large wading bird commonly found across Europe, Asia, and parts of Africa. It is closely related to other herons such as the Great Blue Heron of North America.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Size: 84–102 cm tall; wingspan 155–195 cm; **Weight:** Typically 1–2 kg; **Plumage:** Mostly gray upperparts, white neck with black streaks, black supercilium (eyebrow), long black plumes during breeding; **Bill:** Long, pointed, yellowish (orange in breeding season); **Legs:** Long, grayish or brownish

HABITAT

Freshwater and coastal wetlands; Rivers, lakes, marshes, estuaries, ponds, and even urban parks; Often seen standing motionless at the water's edge

BEHAVIOR

Feeds primarily on **fish**, but also amphibians, insects, small mammals, and occasionally birds; Hunts by standing still and spearing prey with its bill; Flies with slow, deep wingbeats and a retracted neck (unlike cranes, which fly with neck extended)

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BREEDING

Nests in colonies called **heronries**, usually in tall trees; Builds large stick nests, reused year after year; Lays 3–5 pale blue eggs; Both parents incubate and feed chicks

DISTRIBUTION

Very widespread: Europe (common); Asia (to Japan and Southeast Asia); Much of Africa; Some populations migrate; northern birds often move south for winter

CONSERVATION STATUS

Least Concern (IUCN): Stable or increasing in many regions due to adaptability and protection of wetlands

Interesting Facts: Can remain completely still for long periods to ambush prey; Known for stealing food from other birds, including kingfishers and gulls; Frequently seen in human-modified landscapes (parks, canals, fish ponds)

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Thanks to **Gur Asa** for generously providing the excellent cover pictures of the Gray Heron for this December 2025 edition of the IJVM