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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)

**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