

PELECANIFORMES

(Waterbirds)

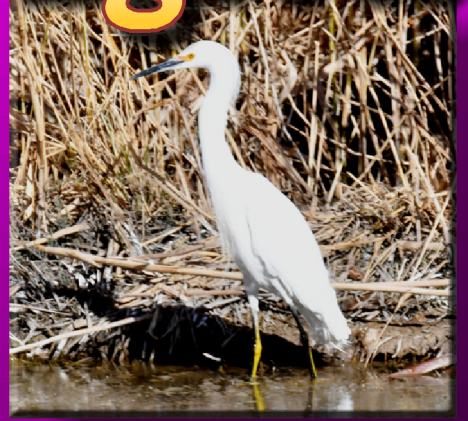
Pelicans



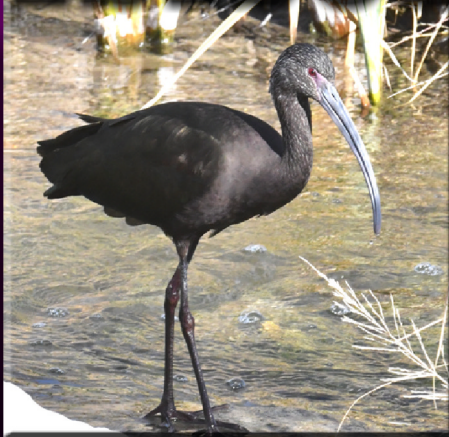
Hérons



Egrets



Ibises



Shoebills

(not native to North America)



Hamerkops

(not native to North America)



Family PELECANIDAE (Pelicans)

American White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)



Measurements:

Ave. Length: (m) 70" (f) 50" Ave. Wing Span: (m) 120" (f) 95"

Average Weight: (m) 20 lbs (f) 11 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size, white overall, huge throat sac and flat-topped yellow-orange bill, yellow legs; black primary and secondary feathers seen in flight; other than size, both genders look the same

Notes:

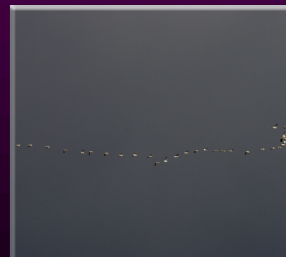
common; nests during spring in localized areas in the interior of NA west of the Mississippi River and north into Canada, then head south to winter along coastal Gulf of Mexico, Florida, s California, Pacific coast of Mexico, and SA; does not plunge for food like the **Brown Pelican**, but rather scoops its diet of fish while swimming or dabbling like some ducks; breeding adults develop laterally flattened horn on upper bill



Mojave presence: migration

Comments:

On a stormy day over Davis Dam near Laughlin, NV, this smoothly morphing squadron of birds stood out in stark relief to threatening skies in April, 2017. To my surprise, I discovered later that they were pelicans, the first I had ever seen flying through the Mojave Desert. Might have been on their way to some springtime resort that probably did not include casinos, but more likely to breeding grounds in the interior of the continent.



Alright, fellas, we're gettin' our picture taken here, so we gotta look sharp. Tighten up that formation back there! Them ducks got their V; we'll give 'em our famous J. Now let's hit it!

Pe2

Family PELECANIDAE (Pelicans)

Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*)

Measurements:

Ave. Length: (m) 60" (f) 39" Ave. Wing Span: (m) 90" (f) 80"

Average Weight: (m) 8 lbs (f) 7 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; long grayish bill; huge throat sac; **breeding**: white head with yellowish wash, maroon nape and neck, pink skin around eyes; gray upper body, darker below; black legs and feet; **non-breeding**: white head and nape, skin turns gray around eyes, pouch and legs turn grayish green

Notes:

common; a mainly marine (saltwater) bird found along the coasts of s NA and n SA; plunge dives for fish, also takes amphibians, crustaceans, bird eggs and nestlings; except for smaller size of female, both sexes essentially the same; five subspecies

Mojave presence: migratory; rare

The Pompano Beach Pier is a popular place to meet the locals who enjoy posing for pics and shaking hands/wings.

Comments:

Though almost exclusively a coastal marine bird, very rare visitors have been spotted at wildlife refuges and other sites in the continental interior, possibly steered off course by storms.

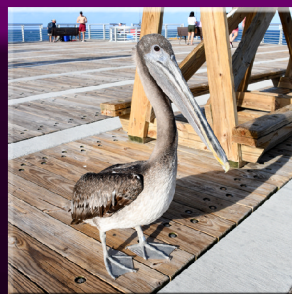
In the Mojave Desert, browns have been occasionally spotted at [Lake Mead NRA](#) and the [Bird Viewing Preserve](#) in Henderson, Nevada.



Pompano Beach, FL



Pompano Beach, FL



Pompano Beach, FL



Pompano Beach, FL



Family **ARDEIDAE** (Heron)

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*)

Measurements:

Length: 46" Wing Span: 72"

Average Weight: 5 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size, grayish blue overall, long dagger-like yellow bill; pale grayish white head and neck; black crown stripes and head plumes; long legs and neck

Notes:

relatively common; usually solitary; found along coasts and in wetlands throughout most of NA s to CA, Caribbean, Galapagos Islands, vagrant to Europe; feeds on fish by wading slowly in shallow water, also takes small mammals on land; largest heron native to NA; five subspecies; both sexes essentially identical except for slightly smaller size of female; rare white and "Wurdemann's" morphs

Mojave presence: migration



Pompano Beach , FL



Pompano Beach , FL



Pompano Beach , FL



Clark Co. Wetlands Park, NV



Comments:

The Great Blue Heron is a regular fall and spring visitor to wetlands and wildlife refuges in the Mojave Desert. This fine fellow afforded me some nice photos in October, 2018, at [Corn Creek](#) in the [Desert National Wildlife Refuge](#) in southern Nevada as he went about his business fattening up for the coming winter.

Family ARDEIDAE (Heron)

Black-Crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*)



Lorenzi Park; LV, NV

Measurements:

Length: 25" Wing Span: 44"

Average Weight: (m) 35 oz (f) 26 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

stout, white to gray body with black crown and wings; red eyes; yellow legs; up to several white head plumes



Bird Viewing Preserve; NV

Notes:

common; mainly nocturnal to crepuscular; found in wetlands, urban parks, etc., throughout coastal US, SA, CA, sub-Saharan Africa, s Asia and Mediterranean Middle East, while migratory through continental Asia, coastal Europe, and interior US into Canada; feeds mainly on fish, crustaceans, frogs, and insects, but will also take small mammals and birds; both sexes identical except for smaller size of female

Mojave presence: migration; some year-round residents

Comments:

Floyd Lamb State Park at Tule Springs near Las Vegas, NV, is a popular winter stopover for a wide variety of migrating birds, including these Black-Crowned Night Herons in February, 2021.

The adult to the left proudly displayed his resplendent crown plume as he lingered on the bank of the pond while observing the ambient avian activity. Then he decided to join in, launching into full flight to the center of interest. Note his retracted neck, black back and white wings, and short yellow legs trailing behind.

The youngster on the right hadn't earned such finery yet, but was no less interested in the festivities abroad, and resolved to also participate. Note his overall light brown plumage.



Corn Crk; DNWR, NV



Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



Family **ARDEIDAE** (Heron)

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)



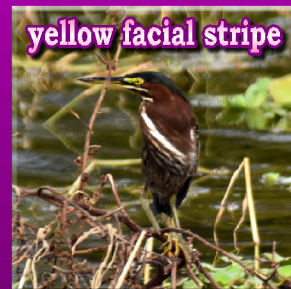
Pompano Beach, FL



Lake Okeechobee; FL



Pompano Beach, FL



Lake Okeechobee; FL

Measurements:

Length: 18" Wing Span: 26"

Average Weight: 7 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small, stocky body, dark back and wings, and chestnut nape and chest, dark iridescent green back; long pointed black bill; short yellow legs; yellow facial stripe; crouching posture when foraging

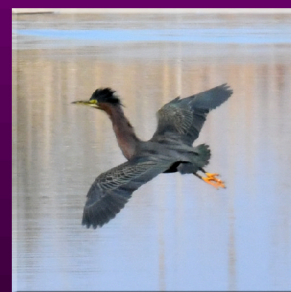
Notes:

common, but solitary and secretive, thus often difficult to spot; mainly crepuscular; found in southern US wetlands from FL to CA and south through Central America and Caribbean; feeds mainly on fish, crustaceans, frogs, etc., also small mammals such as mice; known to use tools (e.g. insects, twigs, etc.) to attract larger prey; both sexes similar except for slightly smaller size of female

Mojave presence: migratory; some year-round residents

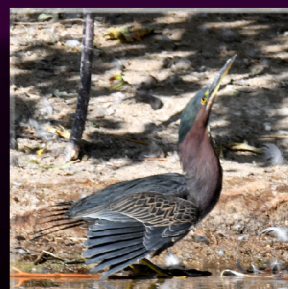
Comments

Green Herons fly with quick, deep wingbeats, and look graceful with the neck tucked in (left) during flight, like all herons. On the other hand, they can also look quite ungainly and rather comical when they extend their long necks, like the one preparing to land (right). Both these birds were enjoying an unseasonably warm January day at the [Bird Viewing Preserve](#) in Henderson, NV.



Comments

Though somewhat uncommon, or at least seldom spotted in their preferred habitat of reed-lined wetlands, occasionally one can be observed lingering along the edges of ponds in urban parks, such as this one at [Lorenzi Park](#) in Las Vegas, NV. No predators to be concerned about leaves plenty of time for leisurely relaxation and showing off; however, this heron's best chicken impersonation made little impression on the female [Mallard](#) resting on the bank!



Family **ARDEIDAE** (Egrets)

Little Blue Heron (*Egretta caerulea*)

Measurements:

Length: 24" Wing Span: 44"

Average Weight: 12 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

blackish blue overall; blue-gray bill with dark tip; gray legs; yellow eyes; **breeding:** purple head and neck; blue-green legs; **juvenile:** all white body, greenish legs, two-toned bill like adults

Notes:

common, but inconspicuous; resident of marshes and other wetlands along coastal US south to Caribbean and coastal SA; breeds mainly in se US; preys mainly on small fish and amphibians, also crustaceans, insects; both genders similar

Mojave presence: rare



Lake Okeechobee; FL



Lake Okeechobee; FL



Lake Okeechobee; FL



Lake Okeechobee; FL

Family ARDEIDAE (Egrets)

Tricolored Heron (*Egretta tricolor*)

Measurements:

Length: 26" Wing Span: 36"

Average Weight: 13 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

dark blue overall with dark purple sheen; white belly; dark eyes; long neck (with white central stripe); long, yellow legs; very long yellow bill (black upper mandible); **juvenile**: red-brown neck, back

Notes:

uncommon; solitary; coastal resident of swamps and other wetlands from NA to SA along Atlantic seaboard, Gulf of Mexico, Caribbean, to Brazil, and Pacific coast from Southern Cal. to Peru; stalks fish, crustaceans, aquatic insects, etc.; aka **Louisiana**

Heron; genders similar except for slightly smaller size of female

Mojave presence: rare/accidental

Comments

Juveniles, such as these in Pompano Beach, FL, display their characteristic red necks and crowns. The one on the left looks rather comical showing off his "Albert Einstein" doo; the persistent pair on the right pester mom for a free lunch.

Comments

Tricoloreds are very rare visitors to the Mojave Desert region. For example, accidentals have been noted in the spring, and otherwise rare in the fall, at the **Havas** NWR near Lake Havasu City, AZ.



Lake Okeechobee; FL



characteristic white underbody and underwing coverts



Family ARDEIDAE (Egrets)

Snowy Egret (*Egretta thula*)



breeding adult

Overton WMA; Overton, NV



black legs, yellow feet

Overton WMA; Overton, NV

Measurements:

Length: 24" Wing Span: 41"

Average Weight: 13 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

all white plumage; long, slender black bill with yellow lores; long plumes on nape and neck; **breeding**: black legs, yellow feet; **non-breeding**: blackish forelegs, yellow behind; **juvenile**: greenish yellow legs

Notes:

common; found in wetlands throughout most of SA, north to Mexico, Caribbean, coastal US, some migrating inland to breed; opportunistic diet, including fish, arthropods (crayfish, insects, etc.), frogs, reptiles, etc.; both genders essentially identical

Mojave presence: migratory; some year-round residents



non-breeding adult

Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



legs: black front, yellow back

Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV

Comments:

The birds below were spotted recently (February, 2021) at the **Bird Viewing Preserve** in Henderson, NV, enjoying a splendid day at a favorite winter retreat. Most in attendance for the big event were attired in their best accoutrement ready for the upcoming season of love. Note the black legs, bright yellow feet, and puffy plumage.



plumes in full display



black legs, yellow feet



legs extend beyond body during flight



retracted neck during flight



Those that have not fully made the change still retain considerable amount of yellow on the back of the legs, while the fronts transition to black. An interesting behavioral trick demonstrated by these two birds was their stamping on the muddy shoreline, presumably to kick up any tasty morsels lurking in the



Family ARDEIDAE (Egrets)

Great Egret (*Ardea alba*)

Measurements:

Length: 39" Wing Span: 58"

Average Weight: 2 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

all white plumage; long, slender yellow bill; black legs and feet;
breeding: delicate ornamental feathers on back

Notes:

common; cosmopolitan in temperate and tropical wetlands, excluding Australia, Saharan Africa, etc.; a slow, methodical wader that preys mainly on fish and frogs, also small mammals, reptiles, and insects; 4 subspecies; both genders identical

Mojave presence: migratory; some year-round residents

Comments:

Winter in the desert can be truly enticing, which explains the attraction for both people and wildlife. While Great Egrets are uncommon visitors, occasionally a few will show up at **Lorenzi Park** in Las Vegas to take advantage of some sun and relaxation.



yellow bill

lake Okeechobee, Florida



**very long neck
extended while walking**

Pompano Beach, FL



greats have long necks...



long black legs

Floyd Lamb SP; LV, NV



retracted neck during flight

Pompano Beach, FL



...but often stand hunched

These photos are evidence that "pictures are worth a thousand denials!" What looks like a classic confrontation brewing between good and evil is actually just a cormorant spreading its wings to dry out in front of an unconcerned bystander minding his own business.



Family **ARDEIDAE** (Egrets)

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)

Measurements:

Length: 20" Wing Span: 36"

Average Weight: 12 oz

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; dagger-like bill; hunched posture; **breeding**: white body with rusty wash on head, breast, and back; yellow legs and bill; **non-breeding**: all white with no rusty wash; black legs and yellow bill; **juvenile**: black bill and legs

Notes:

common; native to tropical Africa and Asia, now cosmopolitan; eats insects almost exclusively, grazing in pastures and fields, and foraging ticks and flies from the backs of cattle (thus its name); smallest of the white herons; both genders essentially identical

Mojave presence: migratory



Pompano Beach, FL



Pompano Beach, FL

How did you guys get such a silly name?



Lake Okeechobee, Florida



Lake Okeechobee, Florida

Ride *one* cow. . . !

Family THRESKIORNITHIDAE (Ibises)

White-Faced Ibis (Plegadis Chihi)



non breeding

brown overall

Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV

Measurements:

Length: 23" Wing Span: 36"

Average Weight: 1.3 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

dark brown with iridescent green sheen; very long dark legs; long grayish curved bill; red eyes; **breeding**: maroon; red legs; pink facial skin bordered in white; **non-breeding**: lacks facial features

Notes:

common; forms large nesting colonies in western US south through Mexico, also souther SA; probes for vertebrates (fish, frogs, etc.) and invertebrates (crustaceans, insects, etc.); both genders similar

Mojave presence: rare



breeding

maroon body

Overton WMA; Overton, NV



flies with neck outstretched

Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



iridescent sheen

probing style of feeding

Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV

American White Ibis (Eudocimus albus)

Measurements:

Length: 25" Wing Span: 38"

Average Weight: (m) 2.3 lbs (f) 1.7 lbs

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

white overall; pinkish long legs and downcurved bill; blue eyes; black wingtips; **non-breeding**: deep red-orange legs and bill; **juvenile**: brown above, white below, paler brown neck; pinkish bill

Notes:

common; resident of urban and coastal wetlands of se US, Mexico, CA to northern SA; interior US outside of breeding season; feeds mainly on small fish and aquatic insects, both genders similar, except for male's larger size, weight, longer and stouter bill

Mojave presence: rare (e.g. Pahrnagat NWR)



all white

pink legs

Pompano Beach, FL



juvenile

Pompano Beach, FL



large curved pink bill

Pompano Beach, FL



black wingtips

Pompano Beach, FL