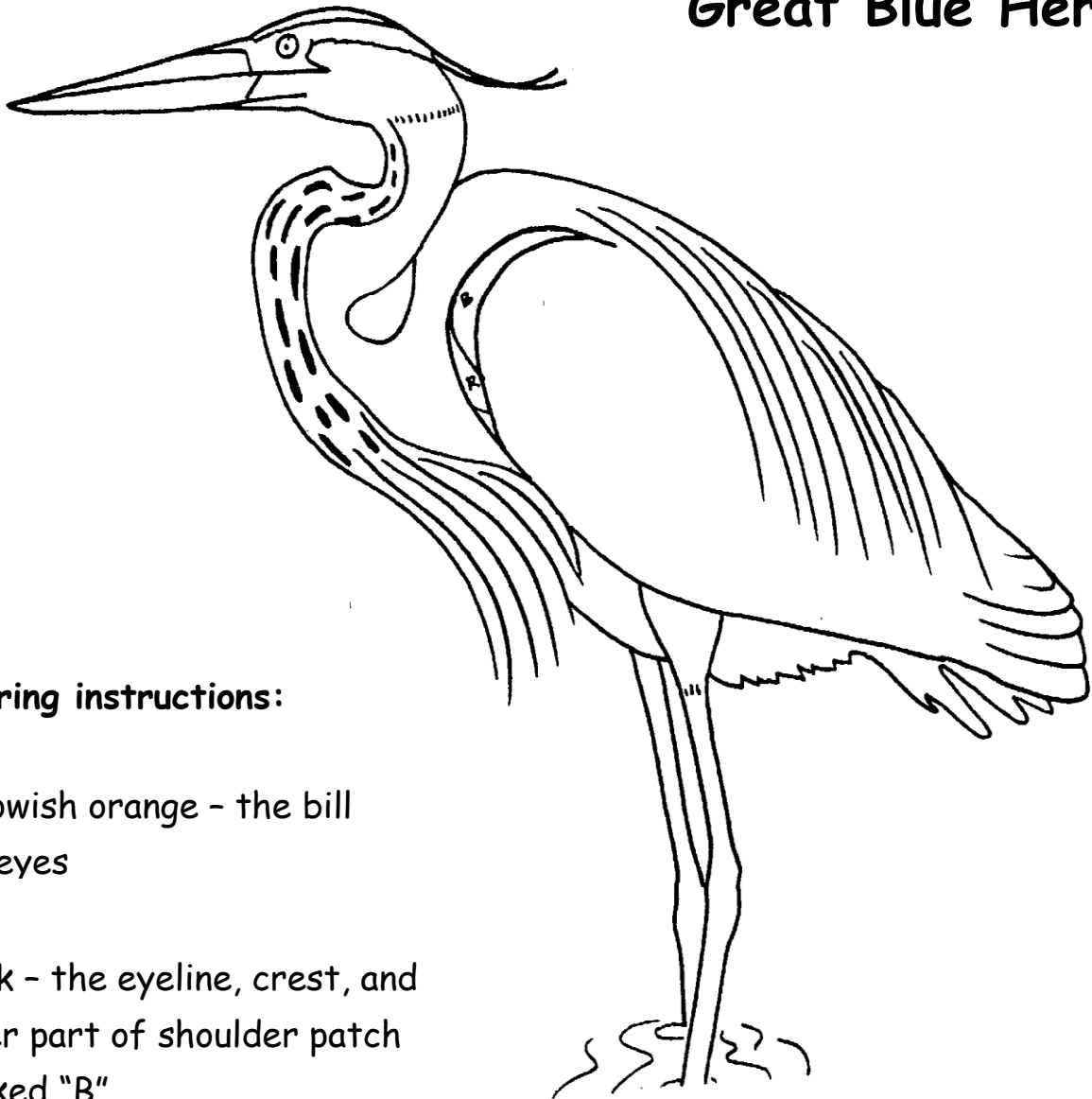


Great Blue Heron



Coloring instructions:

Yellowish orange - the bill and eyes

Black - the eyeline, crest, and upper part of shoulder patch marked "B"

White - the crown, lower part of the head, throat, and breast

Bluish gray - the long nape, back, rump, wings, belly and undertail

Reddish brown - the legs and lower part of shoulder patch marked "R"

Great Blue Heron

Length: 38" **Wingspan:** 70"

Habitat: Resident of riparian areas and marshes

Field marks: A very large, bluish gray bird with a long neck and legs.

Field notes: Slow flying. Curves neck back in flight. Wades in shallow water or stands with head tucked down on the shoulders.

The Great Blue Heron is another riparian bird, like the Belted Kingfisher. In some ways, the heron is very similar to the kingfisher. Both birds hunt and eat animals that live in the water. Both birds plunge their conspicuous beaks beneath the water to catch their prey. Both birds will often patiently, quietly wait for an animal to swim within striking distance.

However, these birds are obviously completely different animals. The heron's very long legs allow the bird to stand in deep water. The long legs also allow it to walk through the water by picking one foot up above the surface, so it doesn't have to be dragged through the water, scaring away prey.

The kingfisher does not wait in the water. It waits on a perch or hovers overhead. While the kingfisher has a short neck to better withstand the shock of diving into the water, the heron has a very long neck. Not only does the long neck allow the bill to penetrate farther and deeper into the water, but it also gives the bill startling speed. It allows the neck to be coiled like a spring, coiled like a rattlesnake, coiled like a boxer's arm, ready to suddenly spring out.

Of course, the prey animals don't want to get caught and water animals have many ways of escaping. Herons need to practice hunting.

Grownups are twice as successful in hunting as young herons. The young herons must spend far more energy as they wade more and strike more.

Great Blue Herons are large birds. And yet, within two months after hatching, their babies have nearly reached adult size. All baby birds grow so fast that one rarely sees "children" - birds flying and running about that are only half the size of adults. Many of the larger birds take several years to reach full adult maturity. But these "teenagers," called "juvenals," cannot be distinguished by size. They are distinguished by body and feather markings.

Great Blue Heron Challenges

Put a check mark in the box when you have completed the challenge.

- See a Great Blue Heron. The male and the female are impossible to distinguish in the field.
- Identify a juvenal, which lacks the white crown of an adult.
- See a Great Blue Heron take off and see how it gradually brings its neck into the backward curve. This position helps bring the bird's center of gravity beneath the wings.
- Hear the loud, guttural "KWOCK" call, often given when the heron is alarmed or taking off.
- See a Great Blue Heron lift its feet as it wades through the water.
- See a Great Blue Heron strike rapidly beneath the water with its bill.

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