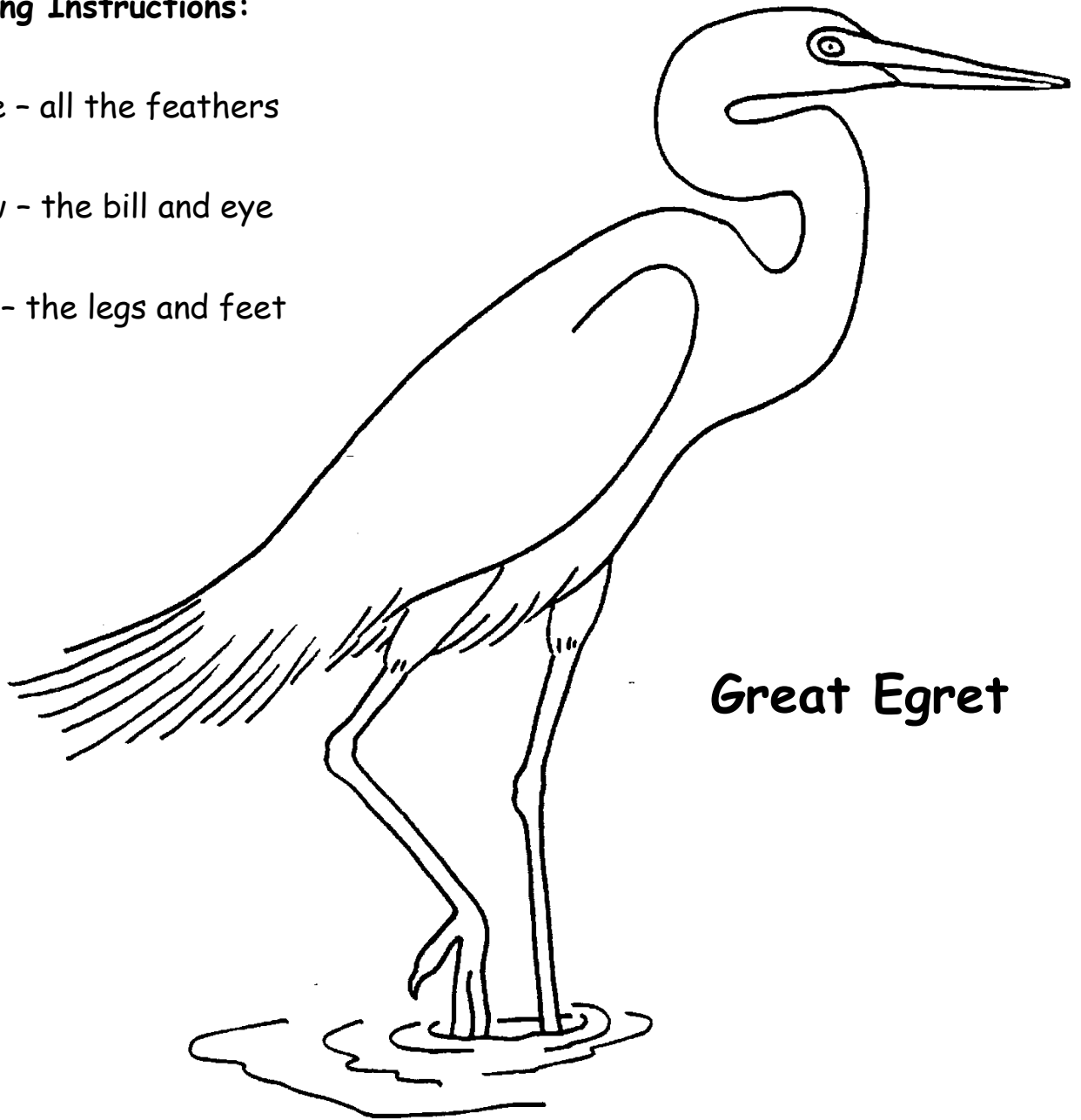


Coloring Instructions:

White - all the feathers

Yellow - the bill and eye

Black - the legs and feet



Great Egret

Great Egret

Length: 32" **Wing span:** 55"

Habitat: Streams, ponds, rice fields, salt and freshwater marshes, mudflats

Field marks: Large, white bird with long neck and long legs. The neck curves back in flight.

The Great Egret is the symbol of the National Audubon Society. It is a large, beautiful, graceful white bird but that is not why it was chosen as the symbol.

In the spring, the male grows special lacy feathers which are part of his display to attract a female. More than a hundred years ago, the style in women's hats became hats decorated with bird feathers. The most popular feathers were the breeding feathers of the Great Egret.

The demand became so intense that hunters were able to sell high-quality egret feathers for up to \$80 per ounce at a time when gold sold for \$16 an ounce. Because feathers are so light, four large egrets had to be killed to gather an ounce of prime feathers.

Egrets nest in **rookeries**, which are many nests all grouped together near the tops of a clump of trees. Since the birds were concentrated in rookeries, lots of money could be made quickly by going into rookeries and shooting the birds. Egret populations declined drastically.

The Audubon Society and other bird preservation groups were formed to save egrets from extinction. A public education effort was started to teach people about the link between buying feathered hats and declining bird populations. By the 1910s, the fashion, and the threat to the birds, had passed. Egret populations recovered. The Great Egret remains the symbol of the National Audubon Society, a reminder of a conservation problem that arose and was solved.

The Great Egret belongs to the same family as the Great Blue Heron and has many of the same adaptations and lifestyle. Like the heron, it flies with slow wingbeats and long neck curved back. Like the heron, it stalks small prey (fish, frogs, crayfish, etc.) in water, striking out with its sharp bill on the long, whip-like neck. Egrets and herons often nest in the same rookeries.

Great Egret Challenges

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

- See a Great Egret. The males and females are difficult to distinguish in the field.
- See a Great Egret flying with slow wing beats and its neck drawn back.
- In the spring, see an egret with a frill of lacy feathers around its back and tail. These were the feathers that almost brought the bird to extinction.
- See a **rookery** in which many egrets, and possibly herons as well, roost closely together in a tree or a group of trees.
- See a Great Egret wade through the water, lifting its feet as it goes.
- See a Great Egret strike rapidly beneath the water with its bill.

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