

# Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)

## Pennsylvania Endangered Bird Species

State Rank: S1B (critically imperiled), Global Rank: G5 (secure)

### Identification

From bill to tail tip, adults are about 40 inches long. The wingspan is 55 inches. The plumage is white, bill yellowish, and legs and feet black.

### Biology-Natural History

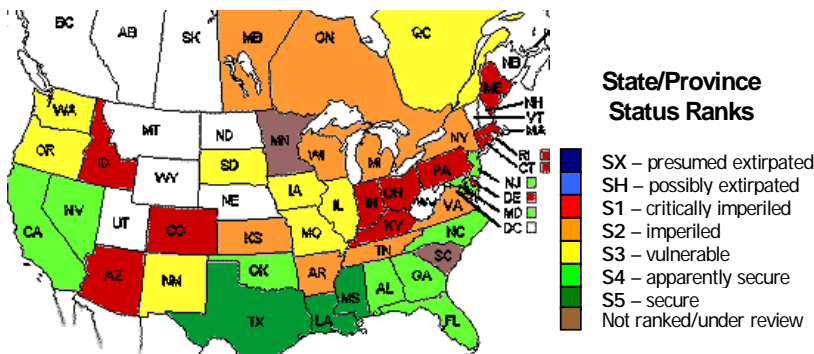
The major distribution of this species is south of Pennsylvania. Fingers of a Mid-Atlantic coastal population extend into the Delaware and Susquehanna drainages. During migration, this species drifts slowly southward. By mid-spring, nesting has started. A nest of sticks contains three to four pale bluish green eggs. After a 24-day incubation period and six weeks as nestlings, young are ready to fly. Maturity may not be reached until the third year. Food consists of frogs, minnows and other small aquatic animals.



Photo Credit: C. Singletary, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

### North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe (August 2007)



#### State/Province Status Ranks

- SX - presumed extirpated
- SH - possibly extirpated
- S1 - critically imperiled
- S2 - imperiled
- S3 - vulnerable
- S4 - apparently secure
- S5 - secure
- Not ranked/under review

### Reasons for Being Endangered

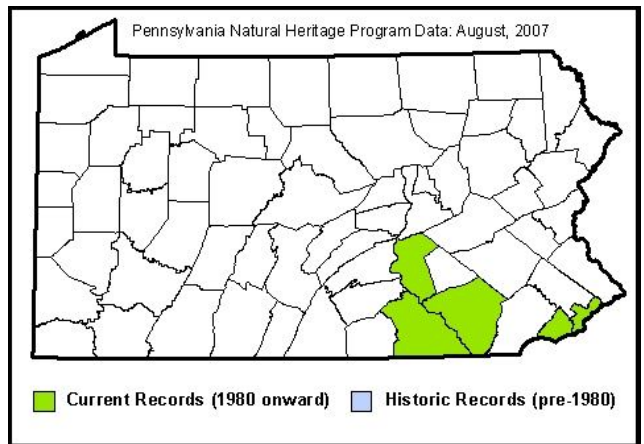
Years ago, this species was hunted for its feathers. By 1917, some doubted this species could be saved from extinction. Pennsylvania's first documented nesting record was in 1957. By 1990, birds had established three modest colonies here. Today, the main threats faced by the great egret is habitat loss (inundation of shallow feeding areas as a result of dams, for example), water pollution, and disturbance of nesting colonies.

### Management Practices

Colonial nesting birds are vulnerable to disturbance and direct persecution. All known nesting colonies should be closed to public intrusion and preserved from developmental pressures.

### Habitat

This egret is typically found feeding in shallow rivers, streams, ponds, lakes and marshes. Nests are found in adjacent trees or shrubby growth, preferable on islands. The birds usually nest in colonies that may include other colonial nesting species.



### References:

- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: August 21, 2007).

