Adaptation in Observation: The Great Blue Heron

Photo by NRP Cpl. Mike Lathroum

To Great Blue Herons, salt marshes like Janes Island, are home sweet home. While salt marshes are inhospitable to many different species, Great Blue Herons have a variety of adaptations that allow them to survive in this harsh habitat.

Starting at the observation tower and making your way along the bulkhead, see if you can spot a Great Blue Heron among the salt marsh cordgrass of Janes Island. Write down and draw your observations about their adaptations on the back of this sheet. If you don't observe any Great Blue Herons during your visit, use this picture of one, to complete the activities below.

Great Blue Herons have long spindly legs that allow them to navigate the deep mud of salt marshes.

Try walking like a Great Blue Heron by bringing your knees up to your chest with each step. Would you be able to walk for long like this?

Great Blue Herons often stand completely still while waiting to surprise and catch their prey.

See if you can stand completely still for two minutes. Then try standing completely still on just one leg for two minutes.

Great Blue Herons are spear fishers. Their long necks and pointed beaks allow them to quickly catch fish.

Are human necks and mouths like this? Try having lunch at a picnic table in the park and attempt to eat without using your hands.

Great Blue Herons aren't the only species to call the salt marshes of Janes Island home.

What other species of plants and animals did you observe while looking for a Great Blue Heron?

Trash that is not properly disposed of is a threat to Great Blue Herons and other marsh birds. Great Blue Herons can die from eating a piece of plastic they mistook for food or becoming tangled in fishing line.

Because of this, it is important to take all of the trash that you produce while at Janes Island with you when you leave the park. Also, if you see any trash on the ground, even if it isn't yours, please pick it up and dispose of it properly along with your trash.

BONUS QUEST!

Great Blue Herons are amazing spearfishers, using their long necks and sharp beaks to quickly catch their prey. However, as you just learned, human necks and mouths wouldn't be very good at catching fish. Instead humans invented many other ways of catching fish, chief among them the rod and reel. Try your hand at rod and reel fishing along Daugherty Creek Canal and see what you can catch. Bring your own fishing rods and tackle or call the Janes Island Duty Ranger at **443-614-2591** and ask about borrowing ours.