

# Great Blue Heron: An echo of the prehistoric

BY BRUCE MCCAMMON

**Y**ou may have seen a Great Blue Heron standing patiently at water's edge — hunting, sleeping, or posing.

You may see one or two flying overhead, legs dangling out the rear and the head pulled into the body, creating a smooth S-shape of the neck.

No matter where you find them, they will impress you with their size and patient hunting style.

The Great Blue Heron is a large bird and hard to miss if they aren't hiding behind shrubs or other vegetation. They are four feet long — beak to tail — with a wingspan of 80 inches. Their blue-gray color can make them somewhat difficult to find in low light but, most of the time, they stand out clearly against water or the sky.



*Bruce McCammon is retired, color-blind and enjoys photographing the birds in north central Washington.*



**The Great Blue Heron: ... waiting, waiting, waiting...**

The call of a Great Blue Heron is unique and coarse. It's more of a squawk than a call and certainly not what I would think of as a song. If you have the opportunity to see one jump into flight while calling, you may find yourself wondering what form of prehistoric creature you are looking at.

It's fairly easy for me to see how the Great Blue Heron mim-

ics paintings of prehistoric flying reptiles that I've seen.

I have some advice for you if you want to out wait a hunting Great Blue Heron — pack a lunch.

These great birds will stand still for extended times as they scan the water for fish swimming nearby.

I waited for an hour once to photograph one lunging to catch a fish. It finally stretched its neck forward and moved the bill close to the water before exploding into the water to grab a fish or small amphibian.

They will eat rodents or snakes, fish or amphibians.

I watched an extended battle as a heron caught and consumed a snake that looked to be more than three feet long. The snake put up a valiant fight, wrapping its length around the neck and beak of the heron. The bird took its time as it maneuvered its prey into position before swal-

lowing it.

You can find Great Blue Herons almost anywhere in North America, South America, Mexico and the Caribbean. Look for them among marshes and at the edges of lakes and streams.

If you're fortunate, you'll find a rookery and be witness to many herons building nests in a tree to lay their eggs and hatch their young.

No matter where you find them, take the time to study their form and behavior. Feel free to think back to pictures of pterodactyl you've seen and wonder about the evolution of the Great Blue Heron.

Wait patiently as a heron hunts to be rewarded by the rapid, slashing entry of the beak into the water and the following extraction of a fish. Be patient, though. You may be there quite some time.

Remember your binoculars and camera. Good luck.