

Grey Heron

Regno: fauna

Birds

 [aironece.jpg](#) [1]

Grey Heron - *Ardea cinerea*

The largest European heron, easily recognised by its bluish-grey colour on the upper parts and white below. In nuptial dress, the adults have two fine, black elongated feathers on their crowns and long decorative plumes on their back and breast. Juveniles have a not very contrasting brownish grey livery.

It withdraws its head in flight, a typical behaviour of all herons which immediately distinguishes them from cranes, storks and spoonbills etc. Like the majority of water birds, herons dedicate a lot of their time to grooming their feathers.

As well as the oily secretion from their uropygial glands, they also use the "powder" produced by specialised feather in the armpit region. The Grey Heron also uses a comb-like nail it has on the middle finger of its foot.

It follows a varied diet, mainly consisting of fish. It often uses its strong, pointed bill to pierce its prey. One particular fishing technique the Grey Heron uses, although rather rarely, is to interrupt its flight and dive into the water to harpoon a fish.

All herons have been reported to prey intensely on The Red Swamp Crayfish ([Procambarus clarkii](#) [2]) in areas colonised by this crustacean. In mixed heronries, the Grey Heron occupies higher positions.

The species is expanding, but compared to the marked diffusion of individuals over the southern areas of the country, Central Italy counts only a few nesting sites.

The Grey Heron has been nesting in the Fucecchio Marshes since 2002, currently with just under 100 pairs.

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Links:

[1] <http://zoneumidetoscane.it/sites/default/files/aironece.jpg>

[2] <http://sitopadule.gis3w.it/en/red-swamp-crayfish>