



Snowy Egret - Comprehensive Questions

While we are in the middle of a hot, Florida summer, there is one Everglades bird species who looks like it has been snowed on recently.

Snowy egrets have fluffy, white feathers resembling messy hairdos in the wind. These plumes were once so popular in women's fashion that they were worth twice their weight in gold.

Directions: Learn more about the beautiful plumes and unique physical features of the snowy egret by reading [Snow Animals of the Everglades](#) (attached below), and answering the [reading comprehension questions](#) (attached below).

Everglades Literacy Lesson Connections:

Grade 3 Lesson 1: Classifying Everglades Animals and their Habitats

<https://www.evergladesliteracy.org/third-grade>

-Students will learn that animals can be classified into six major animal groups and become familiar with representative Everglades animals from all the major groups and with five different habitats of the Everglades where these animals live



SNOW

ANIMALS OF THE EVERGLADES

Snow falling gently outside, logs roasting merrily on a fire, and rosy red cheeks tell us the holiday season is here again...here in Florida, news of faraway snow storms, temperatures plunging below 70°F, and Christmas lights on palm trees will have to suffice.

***FORTUNATELY, ONE SPECIES HERE CAN KINDLE WINTER CHEER:
THE FESTIVE, ALL WHITE, SNOWY EGRET.***

SNOW— WHITE ADORNMENT

Warm descriptions for these little egrets abound: elegant, lovely, beautiful, graceful, dainty and exquisite. Snowy egrets have fluffy, white feathers resembling messy hairdos in the wind that could melt even the coldest heart. These long wispy plumes are grown during the breeding season to attract mates. But beauty comes with a price, and these lovely embellishments also caught the attention of a more sinister source: plume traders. In the late 1800s, decorating women's hats with feathers and even whole stuffed birds was the fashion craze. The breeding plumes of snowy and great egrets were particularly prized and incredibly valuable, worth twice their weight in gold. Hunters, motivated by the lure of easy riches, descended upon wading bird rookeries in the Everglades. Millions of birds were slaughtered each year, and once the parents were killed, the chicks were left to a grisly fate, starvation or death from predation. The snowy egret suffered cruelly from this vogue, nearly vanishing entirely. Other species of wading birds followed in their footsteps, and their numbers plummeted to fulfill the fickle whims of fashion.

Fortunately, a pair of women pioneered the movement to end the plume trade. Boston socialites, they organized tea parties where they urged women to boycott feathers. Hundreds of women agreed to join them, and their efforts lead to the formation of the Audubon Society. In 1913, the Weeks-McLean Act was passed, eventually becoming the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and this legislation stopped the plume trade once and for all. Luckily, these little delightful egrets have bounced back, and are no longer imperiled. However, they still face threats that plague many other species, eye-catching or not, such as habitat loss and degradation, pollution, human disturbance, alterations in hydrology, and potentially climate change.

BEARING GIFTS AND OTHER GOODIES

Dutiful parents, both males and females incubate their eggs and feed their young. Snowy egrets start to breed in the springtime, around March or April in Florida. When one parent takes over from the other on the nest, they present each other a stick as a way of signaling it's their turn to babysit. Not quite the same as lighting a yule time log, but it is charming nonetheless.

To their offspring, they bring a feast of baby bird treats: fish, frogs, small reptiles, mice, insects and other invertebrates. But beware of strangers bearing gifts, during the breeding season, sometimes alligators will place sticks on top of their heads. Wading birds looking for nest building materials may not have such a merry ending -- in the alligator's stomach. But it is a remarkable display of intelligence for a reptile: tool use.

Just a few decades ago, we thought the only animals clever enough to use tools were humans.

THEY LIKE FESTIVITIES AND MERRYMAKING GIFTS AND OTHER GOODIES

Snowy egrets are the social butterflies of the wading bird world. While they nest in isolated places like barrier islands, salt marsh islands, swamps, and marshes, they bring along all their friends, forming big, raucous colonies of fellow wading birds. You'll find snowy egrets in the middle of all the action, nesting in the very heart of the colony. These large, mixed-species nurseries make parenting a little easier, together they can better spot and chase away predators. Never the recluse, their gregarious nature permeates to all aspects of life. They don't like to dine alone, preferring to forage in the company of other birds, and also travel with companions.





They will even hybridize with other species like the tricolored herons, little blue herons, and cattle egrets. But it would be amiss to characterize these egrets as perpetually jolly, they have their moments too, and can be aggressive during feeding or nesting times.

THEY WEAR BOOTS



Okay not really, but a good way to identify snowy egrets is by bright yellow feet that contrast with jet black legs. Affectionately described as wearing golden slippers, these captivating egrets are a favorite subject for photographers, birders and nonbirders alike. These stylish traits, along with their black bills, distinguish them from another white-plumed species, cattle egrets. Cattle egrets, somewhat lacking in size and charisma in comparison, have yellow bills and legs. If you've ever seen a video of white birds riding on a cow's back, yes this is the same species. Large animals like cows stir up insects during grazing, which the cattle egrets then eat. In turn, snowy egrets are much smaller than another white species, the Great egret, also highly praised for its beauty. Finally, if you come upon a small, white bird with an odd looking, long bill, that's an white ibis. Decked out with a red bill, legs, and white feathers, it is another picture perfect creature for the holiday season.





Name: _____

Snowy Egrets in the Everglades Comprehension Questions

1. Why do snowy egrets grow long, wispy plumes?

2. What was the fashion craze in the late 1800s and how did it impact snowy and great egrets?

3. In the late 1800s, how valuable were the breeding plumes of snowy and great egrets?

4. Describe the legislation passed in 1913 and how it affected the plume trade.

5. True or False? (circle one): The snowy egret has never bounced back and is still imperiled.
6. The article discusses the plume trade as a major factor of the decline of the snowy egret species. Today, what are some threats the snowy egret still faces?

7. Which animal is a predator of the snowy egret?
 - a. River otters
 - b. Bald eagles
 - c. American alligators
 - d. Cows
8. True or False? (circle one): Snowy egrets prefer to eat, forage, and travel with companions.
9. Which other wading bird does NOT resemble the snowy egret?
 - a. Great blue heron
 - b. Cattle egret
 - c. Great egret
 - d. White ibis
10. How do we identify snowy egrets from other white plumed birds? List some of the physical characteristics that snowy egrets have.

Snowy Egrets in the Everglades Comprehension Questions

Answer Key

1. Why do snowy egrets grow long, wispy plumes?
They are grown during the breeding season to attract mates.
2. What was the fashion craze in the late 1800s and how did it impact snowy and great egrets?
The fashion craze of the late 1800s was wearing women's hats with bird feathers and even whole stuffed birds. The snowy and great egrets were killed by the millions and their population was negatively affected.
3. In the late 1800s, how valuable were the breeding plumes of snowy and great egrets?
The breeding plumes were worth twice their weight in gold.
4. Describe the legislation passed in 1913 and how it affected the plume trade.
In 1913, the Weeks-Mclean Act passed, which became the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and it stopped the plume trade.
5. True or **False**? (circle one): The snowy egret has never bounced back and is still imperiled.
6. The article discusses the plume trade as a major factor of the decline of the snowy egret species. Today, what are some threats the snowy egret still faces?
Threats to the snowy egret include habitat loss and degradation, pollution, human disturbance, alterations in hydrology, and potentially climate change.
7. Which animal is a predator of the snowy egret?
 - a. River otters
 - b. Bald eagles
 - c. **American alligators**
 - d. Cows
8. **True** or False? (circle one): Snowy egrets prefer to eat, forage, and travel with companions.
9. Which other wading bird does NOT resemble the snowy egret?
 - a. **Great blue heron**
 - b. Cattle egret
 - c. Great egret
 - d. White ibis
10. How do we identify snowy egrets from other white plumed birds? List some of the physical characteristics that snowy egrets have.
Snowy egrets have bright yellow feet that contrast with their jet black legs. Also, snowy egrets have black bills.