

The Great Blue Heron Colony of Alamitos Bay



On this year's Peninsula Neighborhood Association T-shirt is the Great Blue Heron, the largest species of heron in North America with a wingspan reaching seven feet. The ones we see here are part of a designated group called, **The Great Blue Heron Colony of Alamitos Bay**. Alamitos Bay was a natural estuary of the San Gabriel River with vast fresh and saline wetlands that supported abundant wildlife from crustaceans, lizards, and amphibians, to ocean sea otters, sea lions, Harbor Seals, whales, dolphins, sharks, vast amounts of fish, and skies full of migratory and year-round birds. Once populating the area in the thousands, Great Blue Herons were prized trophies and widely hunted almost to extinction by 1900, even before development on the Peninsula and Alamitos Bay.

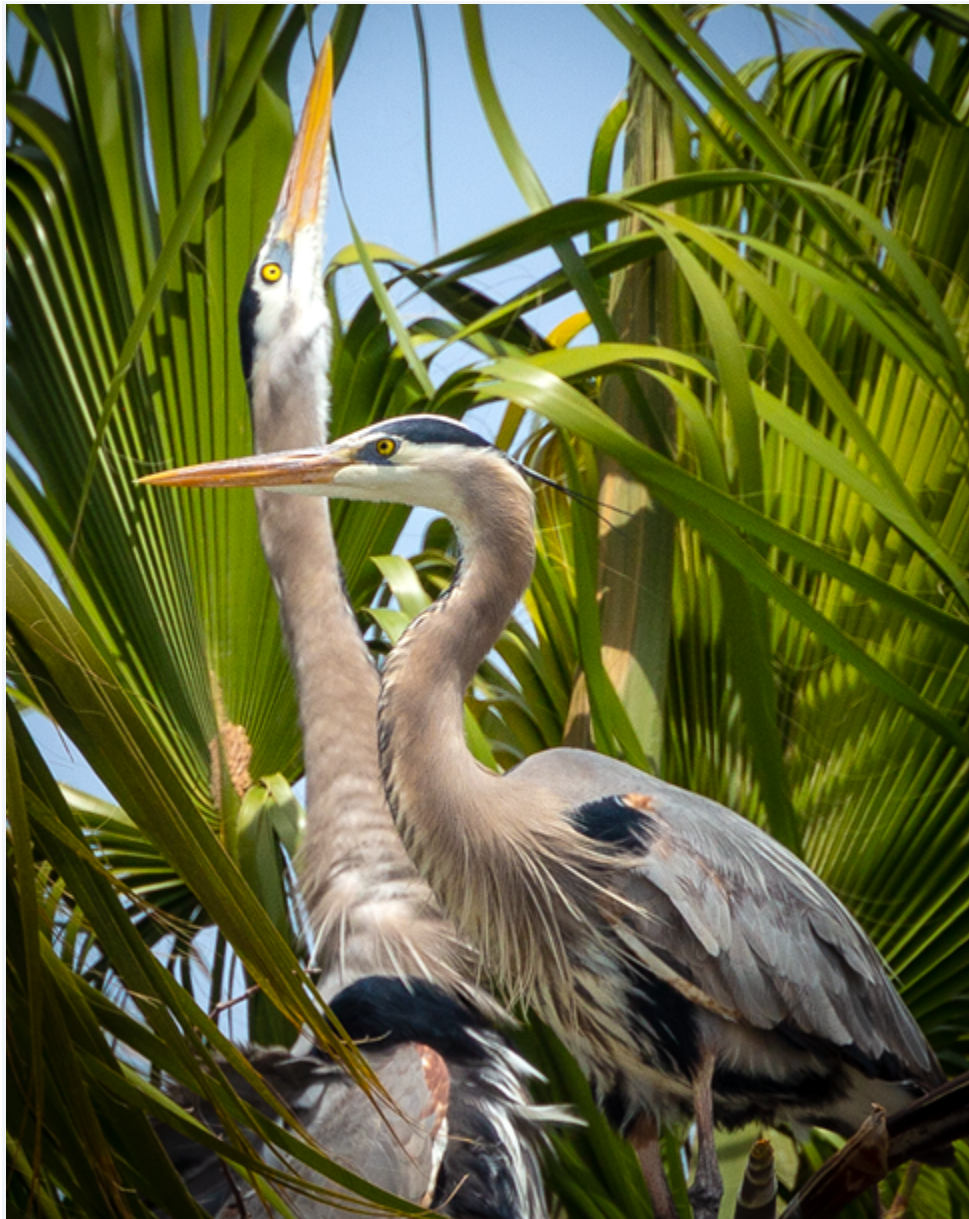
Development reduced habitat and the abundant wildlife with Naples Island developed in 1908–1909, followed by the separation of the San Gabriel River and the Bay with the construction of a rock jetty (early 1920s), the dredging of the Marine Stadium in 1932, and the construction of the Alamitos Bay Marina Basins between the mid-1950s and the mid-1960s, removing a bridge stretching from the Peninsula across the channel to Seal Beach.

On the Peninsula you can see a few remaining 100-year-old duck hunting shacks on 66th Pl., the corner of 67th and Ocean Blvd., and a set of four bungalows on Seaside Walk near 62nd Pl. Originally built without indoor plumbing, the buildings are reminders of how rugged an outskirt the Peninsula was compared to the sophisticated seaside resorts in downtown Long Beach just a few miles away!



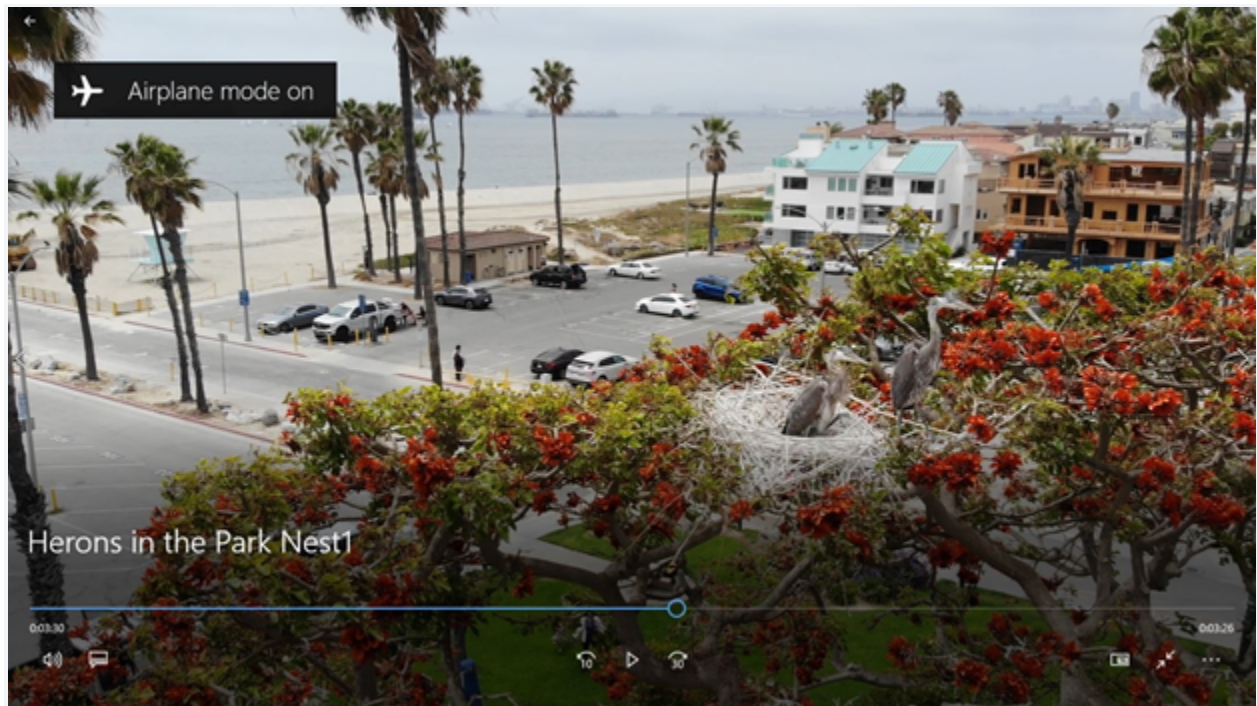
Great Blue Herons became protected by the Migratory Bird Protection Act of 1918. The federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act, which prohibits the killing of any migratory birds except as permitted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, further establishes their safety. The California Coastal Commission also provisions against tree trimming near nesting birds and in the Coastal Zone from January through September.

Last year, May 6th, Peninsula neighbors, including 8-year-old Truman Rue, found tree trimmers cutting off palm fronds supporting the 3-foot nests of the Great Blue Heron and stopped the company from returning the next day to cut all the Peninsula palm trees, including two trees with active nests on his block. Our local heroes caused the City of Long Beach this month, to clarify the zoning and tree trimming policy of the Coastal Zone. The Coastal Zone stretches south and west of PCH from the Los Angeles River to the San Gabriel River with certain wetland areas separately considered northeast of PCH in the Los Cerritos Wetlands. The Peninsula, Belmont Shore, Naples, Marina Drive, and Shoreline Drive and areas south of Ocean Blvd. are all in the Coastal Zone.



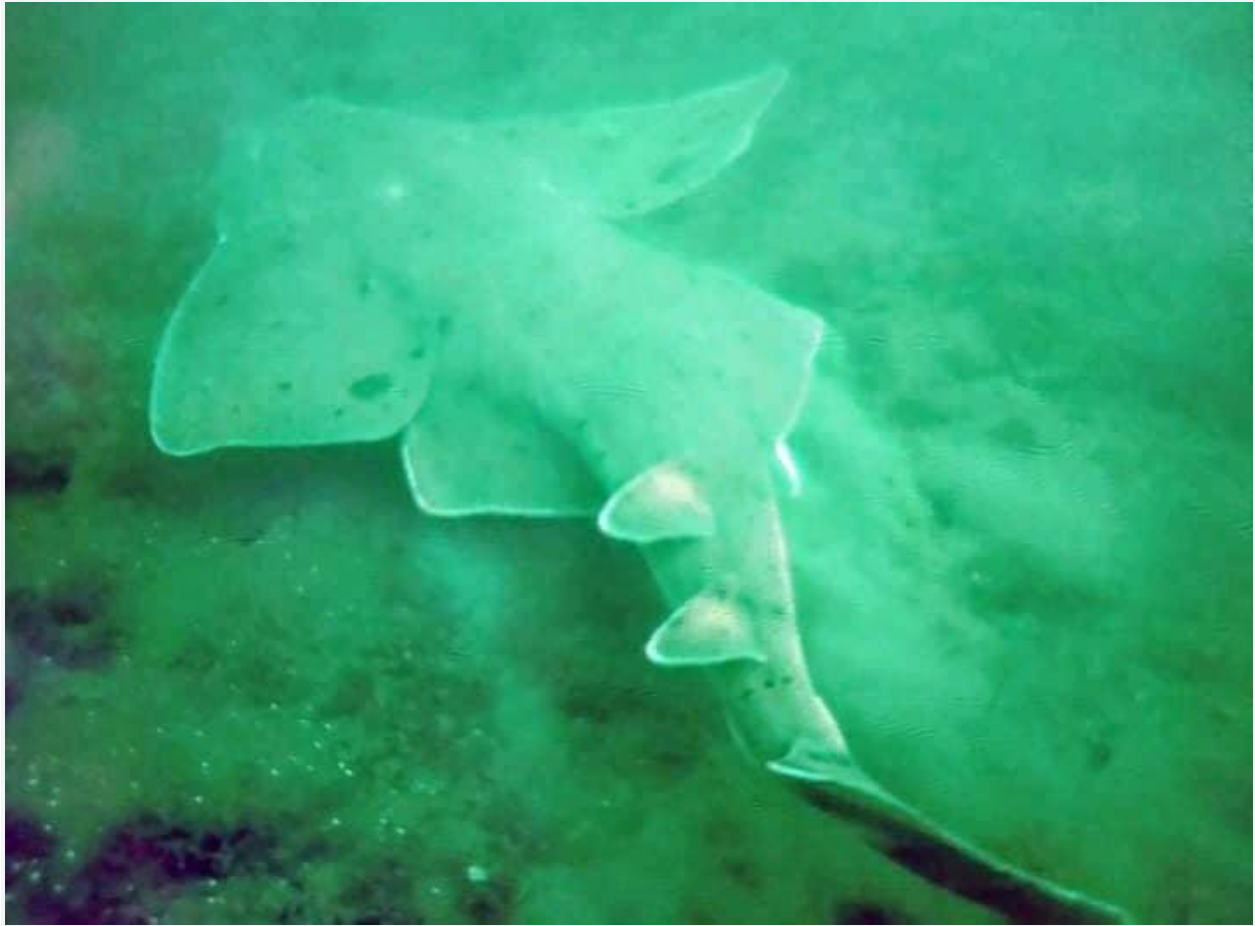
Great Blue Herons look for quiet, safe places to raise their young and the tall 60ft + Washingtonia Palm trees have become their preferred spot. This year, there is a new

Great Blue Heron nest in a Coral Tree in the park in front of ABYC where it is easier to see the action of a busy Great Blue Heron family.



Other unique Alamitos Bay inhabitants include seahorses (featured on the 2017 PNA shirts!) that breed in a secret spot and the flourishing seeded oysters that filter and clean the bay water naturally, less photogenic but equally important to our ecosystem. Travel to the Oceanside to look for juvenile Great White sharks while smaller and

harmless ones (below) can be found in the Bay.



Information, compliments of Aquarium of the Pacific, on the Great Blue Heron:

Family Oriented and Noisy - Great Blue Herons communicate with a wide range of sounds with the result that heronries are noisy raucous places, especially after the eggs hatch. The birds sound “frawnk” in breeding colonies when alarmed; “gooo” at the end of one of the courtship display; “ee” when flying; and a series of clucks when foraging. The bird returning to the nest lets its mate know it is arriving by uttering a “roh-roh-roh” sound, to which the nest-bound mate responds with a series of displays.

Generous Flirts: In addition to announcing his arrival, the male Great Blue Heron often brings the female a twig. She takes the stick and weaves it into the nest as the male taps her bill side-to-side. A heron bringing food back to feed the chicks, perches a short distance away from the nest for as long as five minutes. In the meantime, the hungry chicks click noisily in a chorus demanding to be fed.



Size: Adult herons are 1.1-1.3 m (3.5-4.3 ft) long and have a wingspan up to 2.1 m (7 ft). Hollow boned, they weigh 2.3-3.6 kg (5-8 lb). Males are slightly larger than females.

Compliments of Audubon Society, Great Blue Heron Information:

Feeding Behavior

Forages mostly by standing still or walking very slowly in shallow water, waiting for fish to swim near, then striking with rapid thrust of bill. Also forages on shore, from floating objects, and in grassland. May hunt by day or night.

Eggs

3-5, sometimes 2-7. Pale blue. Incubation is by both sexes, 25-30 days. Young: Both parents feed young, by regurgitation. Young capable of flight at about 60 days, depart nest at about 65-90 days. 1 brood per year in north, sometimes 2 in south.

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Diet

Highly variable and adaptable. Eats mostly fish, but also frogs, salamanders, turtles, snakes, insects, rodents, birds. Has been seen stalking voles and gophers in fields, capturing rails at edge of marsh, eating many species of small waterbirds.

Nesting

Breeds in colonies, often of this species alone, sometimes mixed with other wading birds; rarely in isolated pairs. Males choose a nest site and displays there to attract a mate. Displays include stretching neck up with bill pointing skyward, flying in circles above the colony with neck extended, stretching neck forward with head and neck feathers erected and then snapping bill shut. Nest: Site highly variable, usually in trees 20-60' above ground or water; sometimes in low shrubs, sometimes on ground (on predator-free islands), sometimes well above 100' in tree. Nests (built mostly by females, with material gathered mostly by male) is a platform of sticks, sometimes quite large.

