

## ACR Heron and Egret Project (HEP) 2020 Season

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the **31st** year of ACR's Heron and Egret Project! It's been three decades since we began this study of the nesting ecology of herons and egrets. *Thousands* of volunteer hours have resulted in many publications and opportunities to act for the protection of important nesting sites. Throughout the life of this project, we have seen our environment changing. Weather patterns are shifting, and the landscape has endured both habitat loss and fragmentation. It seems that every day we are learning of new challenges faced by wildlife—ecosystem threats are becoming increasingly complex and, in some cases, the rate of change is out-pacing our ability to respond. The time has come for the Heron and Egret Project to adapt! This season we've made some *big changes* to our monitoring protocol to increase efficiency and allow us to rapidly put your data into the hands of conservation decision-makers. The new methods will be very familiar, but simpler and more straightforward. We've learned a lot about herons and egrets in the last thirty years, and these protocol changes will help ensure the sustainability and relevance of this research project for years to come.



In order to help you adjust to the new protocol, we are holding three orientation meetings (see the attached [HEP Handbook](#) for schedule). Thank you very much for taking the time to attend a meeting! If you are not able to join us at one of these gatherings, just let us know and we will arrange an appointment meet you or consult by phone.

In other news, the Heron and Egret Telemetry Project is now following 11 GPS tagged Great Egrets. Pictured above is the latest addition, known to us as GREG11. His orange and blue color bands are visible in the photo, and he is also wearing a GPS tag on his back. We are eager to follow the nesting attempts of our tagged birds, so as you conduct your monitoring, please be on the lookout for Great Egrets with GPS tags and color bands. If you spot one, please get in touch with us *as soon as possible* so we can get out and map their nest attempts.

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**And now, let's get ready for the 2020 monitoring season!**

Our HEP Packet has transformed! Along with this cover letter, you will receive the new Heron and Egret Project Handbook, which contains all you need to get ready for the season, including your new and improved **Field Form**.

In addition, we have lots of other project related information for you to peruse on the Heron and Egret Project website, such as popular and scientific press articles, training materials, and fieldwork forms. Find the project website here: <https://egret.org/north-bay-nest-monitoring>.

Some things never change! As always, please remember:

- The quality of your data is directly related to the number and duration of your site visits. More observation time will result in better estimates of critical metrics such as colony size.
- If you cannot observe your site during a Regional Observation Period, *please contact us in advance*. In order to compare data across the study area, we need all observations to follow the Regional Observation Period schedule as closely as possible. If you can't make a visit, we will help you make sure your site is covered.

And always: Our first concern is for the birds. Be cautious. Watch for alert postures when you approach a colony and retreat if there is any indication of disturbance. Hérons and egrets are especially sensitive to disturbance early in the season. Our best approach is to treat these beautiful birds with cautious respect.

**Your first observation period is March 6-8, so please plan your visit now.** If you have any questions please call, email, or text. We are happy to talk about the project with you at *any time*. We are looking forward to another a great season!

With appreciation,

Emiko, David, Barbara, and the Cypress Grove Research Center team