

ACR Heron and Egret Project (HEP), 2022 Season

Dear Friends,

Our 33rd year of monitoring herons and egret nesting activity is upon us, and I am feeling very fortunate to be planning for this season with you all!

As last year, we are planning a complete season (Mar-Jun) but given the uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic, it is impossible to know for sure how things will go. As the season progresses, we will be keeping close tabs on state and local public health orders, and if it becomes necessary to pause our work, we will be in touch. Monitoring is a critical component of conservation, but the safety of our volunteers and staff are paramount. We hope that you will check in with us regularly during the season and let us know how things are working out. If you find that you do not feel safe at your nesting site and/or are unable to comply with COVID-19 safety practices (such as masking and social distancing), please let us know as soon as possible. We want you to be comfortable, and we are here to help.

As you prepare for your first observation period, please take the time this year to *check in early* with any access contacts to your nesting sites. If you need help with access, or do not know who to contact, let us know as soon as possible. We are doing our best to contact all landowners and update permits, but we are aware that our observers sometimes have access contacts that have not yet made it back to our database. While restrictions have lifted in many places, keep in mind that simple logistics such as access to public restroom facilities may be more challenging this year. Let us know right away if you encounter any problems with access so that we can resolve them before an observation period is missed. You can reach us any time by phone, text, or email.

Lastly, we invite you to attend an online Heron and Egret Project training meeting on *Saturday, February 19th at 10:00 am*. We hope it will be a good opportunity say hello, share our



Photo credit: Nils Warnock

experiences in the field, and to answer any questions about how the work is done. For those of you who are new to the project, this training is mandatory; experienced observers have the option of attending. We strongly encourage all volunteers to join us—we have lots to share and tips for monitoring to bring to your attention. To help the meeting feel relaxed and comfortable, it will not be recorded. However, I will post a video of my presentation for those who are interested and cannot attend. To register for the meeting, please contact Barbara (Barbara.Wechsberg@egret.org) or use [this link](#).

The staff here all thank you all for your patience, your adaptability, your determination, and the care and concern you exhibit for the world around you. As we have always said, *we could not do this without you!*

And now, let's get ready for the 2022 monitoring season!

Along with this cover letter, you should have received the revised [Heron and Egret Project \(HEP\) Handbook](#), which contains all the instructions you need to get ready for the season, including your *field form*.

If you are missing any project-related information, you can find these items and many more documents on the [Heron and Egret Project website](#).

Important things remember:

- The quality of your data is directly related to the number and duration of your site visits. Please do not miss any of the Regional Observation Periods. Longer site visits will result in better estimates of critical metrics such as colony size—the longer you stay, the more you will see.
- If you cannot observe your site during a Regional Observation Period, *please contact us in advance*. In order to compare data among regions, 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.
- Good data are important, but the birds are more so. 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 always treat these beautiful birds with cautious respect.

Your first observation period is March 4-6, so please plan your visit now. We will be in touch with everyone to update you on your site assignment before this first observation period. If you have any questions please call, email, or text. We are happy to talk about the project with you at *any time*.

With appreciation,

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