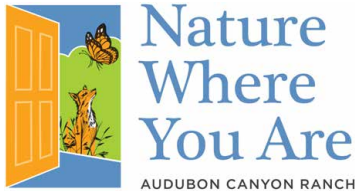


Meet Ephran the Great Egret



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Written by Jacqueline Levy

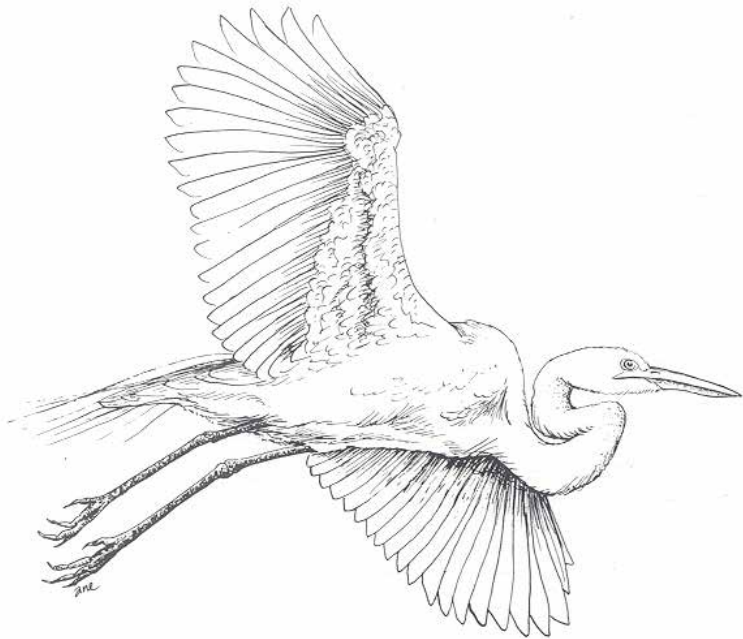
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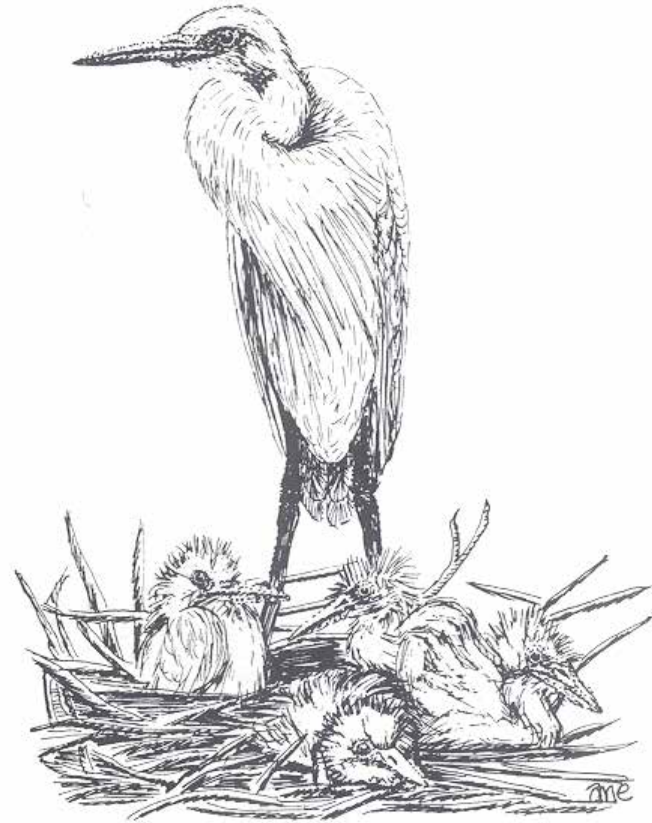
CHAPTER ONE

Hello, my name is Ephran. I am a Great Egret. I am not being boastful or anything, that is just what the humans named my species.

I am a tall bird, 34 inches, with long legs and a long neck. My feathers are white. My eyes are yellow. My bill is mostly yellow with a bit of black on the tip. My legs and feet are black. I have a crook in my neck that gives it an S shape.



Color the pictures of the Great Egrets using Ephran's description. Color in the background so the white bird stands out.



How many inches tall are you?

Are you taller or shorter than Ephran?

It is the first week of March, the beginning of spring. This time of year is called the breeding season. The breeding season is when egrets, like myself, find a mate, lay eggs and raise chicks. A mate is a partner to have a family with.

Spring is a good time to start a family, because it is easier for me to find food in my favorite places such as ponds and creeks. The water is lower in the ponds and moving slower in the creeks than during the rainy winter season. I can stand in the water without getting many of my feathers wet while catching yummy fish.



Here is the tree where I build my nest during the breeding season. The tree is on West Ninth Street in Santa Rosa, California. I am part of a colony which is a group of birds nesting together. Do you see those clusters of sticks and leaves in the tree? Those are nests.

We are not all Great Egrets here. The other types of birds in my colony are: Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets and Black-crowned Night-Herons.



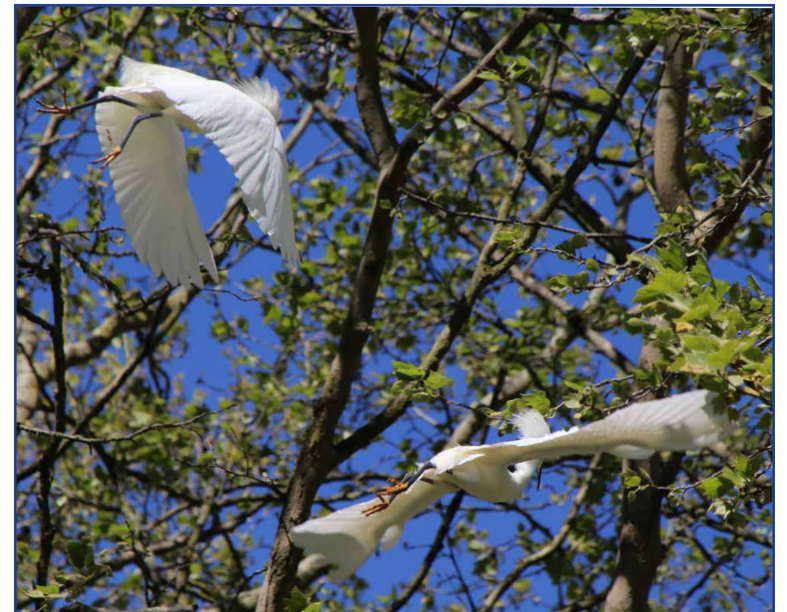
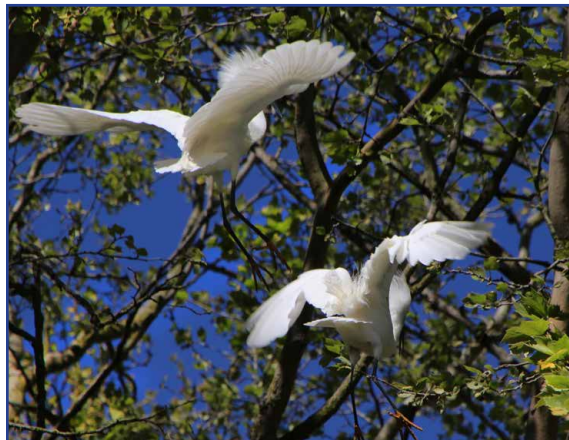
The bird on the left is a Black-crowned Night Heron and the two on the right are Snowy Egrets.



Try to count how many nests are in the tree. How many did you find?

CHAPTER TWO

There are only a few really good places for a nest. Male birds, like these Snowy Egrets compete for the best spots.



Can you tell from the pictures which bird won the competition for the nesting site?

Once I found and defended my spot on the tree for a nest I needed to attract a mate.

I like to dance to attract a mate. When I dance I stretch out my neck, lift my head then bring it down and sway it back and forth. Then I snap my bill. I bob up and down, then pick up sticks with my bill.

When I dance I can show off how healthy and resourceful I am. I dance in a tall tree where I plan to build my nest with my new mate. The tree is in a grove near good foraging sites. Foraging is finding food.

The dancing works! A female named Blanca came to join me. She has become my mate.

Here is a link to a video of a Great Egret dancing.
Try your own egret dance. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSP0qYTabQ4>



CHAPTER THREE

It is a beautiful Thursday morning in April. Blanca and I are taking turns incubating our eggs. Incubation means sitting on our eggs to keep them warm until they hatch.

Blanca laid one egg two days before yesterday, another yesterday and one more today. Our eggs are a beautiful greenish-blue color.

Draw an egg under each of the days that Blanca laid an egg. (Hint: start on Thursday and go backwards from there.)

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday

Thursday Friday Saturday

How many birds are in the top picture?

What can you see in the bottom picture that is not in the top picture?



CHAPTER FOUR

Hello again, it is the first week of May.

Boy am I tired. All of our eggs have hatched. Not all at once. The second egg hatched two days after the first one. The third egg hatched four days after the second one.

Blanca and I have been taking turns watching the nest while the other goes and finds food for our three chicks.

I have already fed my chicks twice after hunting for food and Blanca is out looking for food now. I caught two frogs and a fish the first time I went hunting in a creek nearby. The second time I went out I caught a snake, three lizards and a gopher in a large field that is only a five minute flight from here.

If Blanca and Ephran's first egg hatches on the third day of the month what day of the month did the second egg hatch?

What day of the month did the third egg hatch?

How many total animals did Ephran catch to feed his young?



It is the second week of May now. It has gotten pretty loud at the colony with all of our chicks asking for food.

I just regurgitated some food into the nest for my chicks to eat. Regurgitate is a big word for throw-up. I am not sick, this is how birds like me feed our young.

In a week or so the chicks will be big enough for me to put food from my bill directly into theirs. None of our chicks can fly yet.

How many chicks in the bottom picture?

Name two ways the chicks look different than the adults.



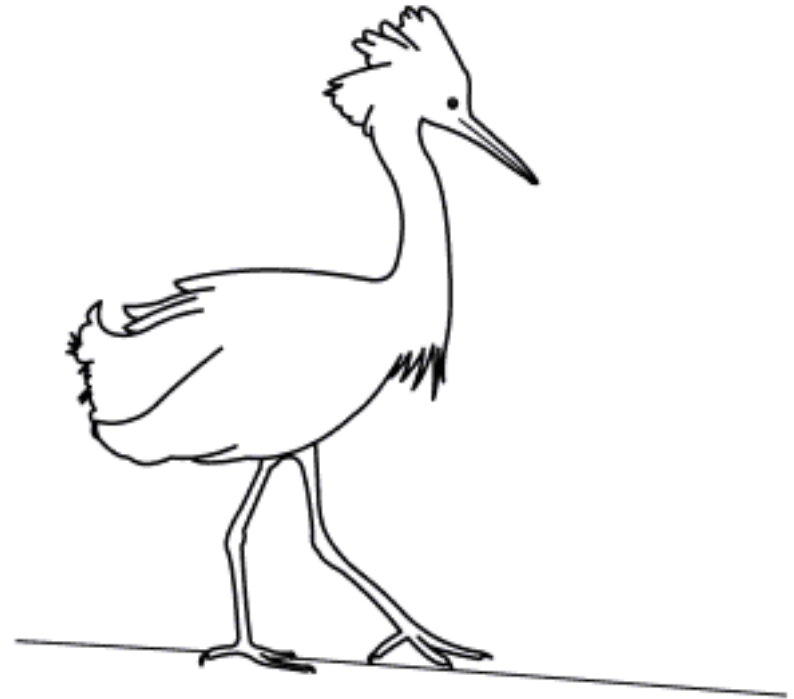
I would like to introduce you to my pal Shorty. Shorty is a Snowy Egret, he is nesting in the same tree as me. I call him Shorty because he is 10 inches shorter than me.

You humans can tell he is a Snowy Egret by his yellow feet. The rest of his legs are black, though when he was younger they were yellow too. His bill is black. During breeding season the skin between his eyes and beak turns from yellow to red. This color fades back to yellow as the season progresses. When the color is about half-way back to yellow, can you guess what it looks like? That's right--orange!

How tall is Shorty?

Notice the difference in the color around the eyes of the birds in the pictures to the right? What does the difference in color mean?

Color the Snowy Egret drawing using Ephran's description. Pick a background color to fill in around the bird so the white feathers stand out.



Here is another friend I would like you to meet, Bella. Bella is a Great Blue Heron. Bella has her nest in another colony, but we hunt in the same creek.



Bella is 12 inches taller than me. She has mostly blue-gray feathers. Her feet and legs are gray. Her bill is yellow like mine. She does have some white under her eyes and a bit of orange-brown at the top of her legs.

Bella laid her four eggs one month before Blanca. She and her mate feed their chicks day and night.

What month did Bella lay her eggs?
(Hint: what month did Blanca lay her eggs? What month comes before that?)

How tall is Bella?



Color Bella using Ephran's description of her.

CHAPTER FIVE

I am glad that you have been so quiet and careful when you visit. That helps all the birds here feel safe.

There was a time before the barricade was put up when the people visiting were loud. They were honking horns, and some even ran around right under our nest tree. That scared me and Blanca and we flew away. We waited several hours until the people left. The chicks were very cold and hungry by the time we got back, and we were worried that they could have gotten eaten by a raven while we were away.

How could you be a good neighbor while Ephran, Blanca and the other birds are nesting?



The orange fence is a barricade to protect the nesting birds

Black-crowned Night Heron chick

CHAPTER SIX

It is the last week in June, five weeks since I saw you last!

It is a hot day. The chicks have all grown a lot these past weeks.

They can all fly. They are not great at flying yet, but they are trying. Blanca and I will still be looking after our young ones for another month.

What month will it be when all the chicks are ready to leave the nest? (Hint: what month comes after June?)

Name two ways the chicks in the top are different from when they first hatched.

The bird in the bottom picture is a Black-crowned Night Heron. How does it look different from the Great Egrets above it?



Great Egret chicks



Black-crowned Night Heron chick

CHAPTER SEVEN

It is September, three months since I last saw you. Things are very quiet around here now. Everyone has left.

I have been spending most of my time along the coast. I just came back here to sleep tonight.

Last I heard Blanca was in Mexico and Shorty was spending most of his time along the creek a few miles from here.

I wanted to say thank you for being a good neighbor while I was nesting here and keeping an eye on the trees for us while we have been away. This is a special place. It is near a field and creek that are great places to find food. There are very few predators around that like to eat egret chicks. It is a safe place for us to nest.

The colony will return in the spring. Until then my friend, take care.

How can you take care of the places that Ephran needs to survive?

Draw a picture of yourself looking after Ephran's trees.

Here is a link to a map of "heronries" heron and egret colonies in the San Francisco Bay Area: <https://www.egret.org/map-heronries>

Time line activity

Introduction:

In the story you just read Ephran and his friends were busy building nests, laying eggs, and raising chicks. All of these things take time and happen in order. Below is a time line of the breeding season. The spaces between the lines are the weeks. There is also a list of events in the birds lives. The list is out of order.

Instructions:

1. Use the story to put the events in order.
2. Write (or draw a picture) of the events in the correct part of the time line. If you don't have enough room you can draw your own time line on another piece of paper.

Event list

- Chicks leave the nest
- Great Egrets lay their eggs
- First Great Egret egg hatches
- Male birds dance to attract females
- Great Blue Herons lay their eggs
- Great Egrets put food in the nest for chicks
- Great Egret chicks start learning to fly
- Males and females build nests together
- Great Egret chicks can get food from parent's bill
- Male birds fight over nesting sites

March

April

May

June

July

August

March	April	May	June	July	August