

Hérons and Egrets

Great egret / *Ardea alba* / Dai-sagi / ダイサギ

The great egret, as its name suggests, is a large (84 to 94 centimeters long) white bird, with a long, powerful bill that is black during breeding season and yellow at other times. It winters in the Amami Islands, where it is seen using its long neck with a distinctive S-curve to forage on reefs and in the waters of tidelands, rice paddies, and swamps. It feeds on fish, frogs, and other aquatic animals. Unlike the plovers, the great egret moves very slowly, standing and waiting for its prey to approach before striking with its dagger-like bill. When it flies, it tucks its neck into a more aerodynamic shape, with the legs extending almost straight back from the body.

Pacific reef egret / *Egretta sacra* / Kuro-sagi / クロサギ

The Pacific reef egret, also known as the eastern reef egret and the Pacific reef heron, is found throughout Asia up to southern Japan. It can be seen both on the coral reefs and among the mangroves of Amami-Oshima. The bird is a medium-sized heron (58 to 66 centimeters long) with a relatively short neck and legs. It appears in two forms: white, and the more common dark blue-gray, which is why it was given the Japanese name *kuro-sagi* (“black heron”). It usually hunts alone, and can be recognized by its posture, with the neck drawn back into a crouching pose before snapping the head forward to stab its prey.