

Stop 6 THE GREY HERON

Welcome to **my home**, a perfect habitat for a **grey heron!**

You are in the central area of the forest and if you look at the top of the tallest ash trees you can see a colony of grey herons.

The presence of the Zăval Forest Nature Reserve in a setting where there are extensive wetlands, ponds, channels, creates a favourable combination for the species that are related to both types of habitats: aquatic and forest.

That is why I, the grey heron, have made my nest here, on top of the tallest ash trees in the midst of this oasis of greenery.

In Latin, they call me *Ardea cinerea*: *ardea* means heron, and *cinerea* means grey.

The grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*)

It is the biggest of the herons in our country. It's greyish, with black and white on its neck and head. While flying, it has the particular silhouette of the herons, with its neck tight and bent in the shape of an S, unlike spoonbills and storks that fly with it stretched forward. The body length is 90 - 98 cm, the weight is 1020 - 2073 g and the spread of the wing is 175 - 195 cm. It usually nests on the branches of willows and other tree (tall) species, in small, monospecific colonies, but also in mixed colonies. The nest is chosen preferentially, in trees near the water and implicitly near food resources. It can reuse the nest from past years, being considered a migratory species, or partially migratory; specimens can also be seen here, in the Zăval Forest, in autumn and late winter. The nest is constructed of branches and other dry plant materials, sometimes also being used by raptors.

The non-resident nesting population uses the protected natural area for breeding; the breeding period takes place between January and June. Once the male attracts a female, an elaborate courtship ritual begins: stretching the neck as far as possible, pointing the beak to the sky, clattering their beaks, making sounds and pecking each other. The bond between the two will only last for one mating season. They start nesting relatively early, sometimes in March if the weather is favourable. They lay 1 to 10 eggs, on which both parents, by turn, sit for a period of 23 to 32 days. The chicks are able to fly 42 to 55 days after hatching, but use the nest for another 10 to 20 days. Competition between chicks in the same nest can sometimes lead to the elimination of the younger and less developed ones, sometimes resorting to cannibalism. They lay eggs only once a year, but if the eggs are destroyed, they often lay the second set of eggs.

It is a mainly opportunistic, carnivorous species, feeding mainly on fish. In addition to fish, they also consume: amphibians, reptiles, molluscs, crustaceans, aquatic insects, micro-mammals, medium-sized mammals (rabbits, squirrels etc.), but also birds and their offspring, especially species inhabiting the aquatic habitats. They also consume small amounts of vegetation and sometimes corpses.



Photo 11: Colony of herons in the Zăval Forest and the *grey heron* in the natural environment

DID YOU KNOW?

- ... forests are home to 80% of the world's animals, plants, fungi and bacteria. These include nearly two-thirds of all plants, three-quarters of all birds, 80% of amphibians and 68% of mammals.

ACTIVITY:

- From near the heron colony, watch the activity of the birds. And if you managed to borrow binoculars or a scope from the accompanying staff, you can imagine that you are part of their family and go fly with your brothers. How do you feel? More free, with no space constraints? Share your emotions with those around you!

ROUTE DIRECTION

And here are, we've almost reached the end of the trail. Go straight ahead on the path to the exit.



**IT WAS A GREAT PLEASURE TO HAVE YOU AS OUR GUEST.
IN THE FUTURE WE WILL PREPARE BEAUTIFUL NEW SURPRISES FOR YOU. FAREWELL!**

