

# Wading & Fishing Birds

Since European colonization of North America, wading and fishing birds have faced many challenges, including hunting, pollution, and habitat degradation and loss. The battle to save populations has made some of these species icons of the environmental movement. As species high on the food chain, large wading and fishing birds serve as excellent indicators of the overall health of ecosystems.



The Campus Lagoon and other local sloughs and their adjacent coastal woodlands provide important foraging, roosting and breeding resources for these birds. Originally oak dominated, these woodlands now contain Australian eucalyptus trees.

## Green Heron

**ID tip:** Small, auburn throat and greenish back.

**Lagoon use:** This secretive bird is seen occasionally foraging along the shore. Found in small numbers across the county at lakes, ponds, and sloughs.

► **Survives with stealth:** If you encounter a green heron, you are a keen observer and have made your way to a more protected area; these birds prefer less open areas and tend to forage alone.



Roosts in trees and can nest more than 100 meters from water.

## Great Egret

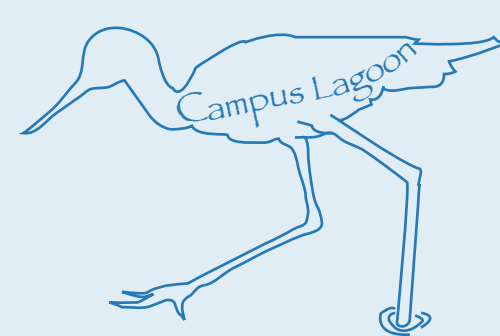
**ID tip:** Yellow bill, black legs and toes; larger than Snowy Egret.

**Lagoon use:** Forages along the shore and roosts in eucalyptus at night. Breeds near Goleta Slough mouth.

► **Loss of habitat:** Since the 1700s and especially during westward expansion, more than 100 million acres of the original 127 million acres of wetlands in the US have been drained and converted for agricultural and recreational uses. Wading bird populations have suffered significantly.



Four Great Egrets and one (smaller) Snowy Egret. Great Egrets forage all along the lagoon shore.



## Great Blue Heron

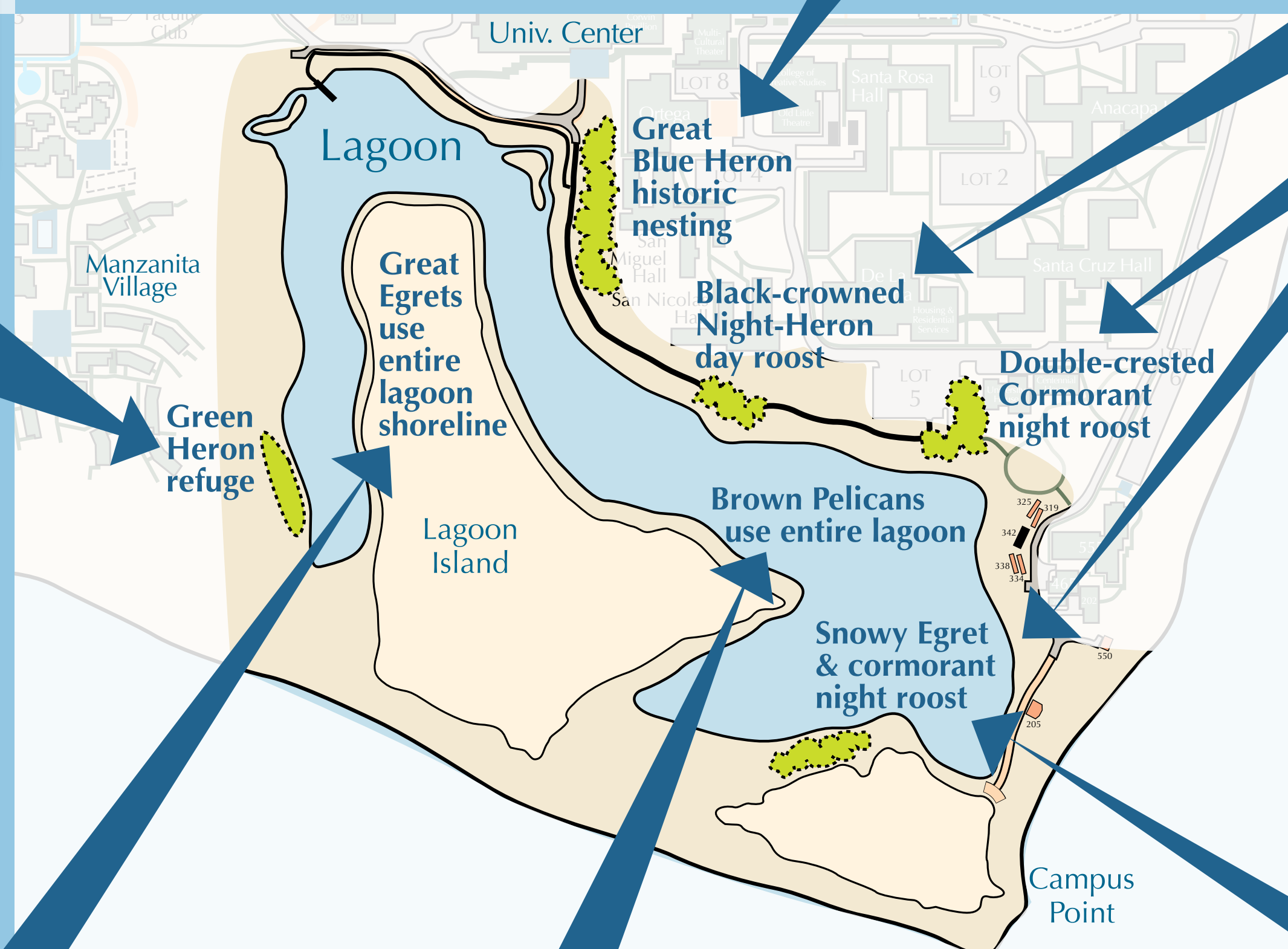
**ID tip:** Elegant crown feathers and tall stature distinguish this blue-gray bird.

**Lagoon use:** Once nested in dense eucalyptus along lagoon north shore until the student population increased in late 1980s. Now nests in trees near Goleta Slough mouth.

► **Rookery protection helps:** Across the US, development has impacted this colonial nesting species; efforts to protect nesting sites in California are benefiting Great Blue Herons locally.



Forages for fish along the shore and for gophers and lizards in upland areas.



## Black-crowned Night-Heron

**ID tip:** Short legs and apparent lack of a neck distinguish this stout bird.



Adult aggressively stalks underwater prey.



Juvenile plumage

**Lagoon use:** Forages during the night and roosts in willow trees along the north shore of lagoon.

► **Small but fierce:** An aggressive predator of frogs, snakes, mollusks, and small breeding birds.

## Double-crested Cormorant

**ID tip:** Orange throat in adult, pale breast in juveniles. The only cormorant seen inland of the beach (Brandt's and Pelagic Cormorants are predominant offshore).

**Lagoon use:** More than 200 birds regularly roost overnight in several eucalyptus



Commonly seen drying wings after diving for fish.

trees along the north and south shores of the lagoon. They often forage and rest in the lagoon during the day. Some breed on the Channel Islands.

► **Oil spill icon:** Images of oil-covered cormorants and other animals from the 1969 Platform A oil spill played an important role in mobilizing people against oil drilling and other environmentally degrading activities. Earth Day began in Santa Barbara in response to this tragedy.



<http://www.getoilout.org>

## Brown Pelican

**ID tip:** Most commonly seen with all gray immature plumage. Performs amazing vertical hunting dives.

**Lagoon use:** This coastal bird regularly rests in the lagoon, using the dock and small islands. Most local birds breed in Mexico, but some also breed on the Channel Islands, especially Anacapa.



Photo shows full range of breeding plumages.

► **Toxins rise through the food chain:** Use and improper disposal of DDT herbicide in the ocean led to eggshell thinning and broad nest failure in fish-eating birds like the pelican and Bald Eagle. Through a process called biomagnification, toxins in lower-level organisms accumulate in the tissues of organisms higher in the food chain to the point of impacting their reproduction. Pelicans have recovered dramatically since regulations such as the Clean Water Act have halted DDT use in the US.



Similar in size to less common Cattle Egret, but has yellow toes and dark bill.

## Snowy Egret

**ID tip:** Black legs and yellow toes are distinguishing features.

**Lagoon use:** Snowy Egrets forage along the shore and roost high in eucalyptus trees on the north side of Campus Point.



Feather accessory common circa 1900.