

OUR HERONRY AT WEIR WOOD

Weir Wood Reservoir hosts a significant breeding colony of Grey Herons. The Herons can be seen all year round; but numbers start to build up in January when the breeding season gets under way.

NESTING: Nest building starts in January and continues in February in the tall trees on the North Bank at the West End of the reservoir. Some nests are reused year after year. Some are damaged and have to be rebuilt. New breeders have to start their nests from scratch. The nest is about 60 cm wide and made from twigs. They build their nests near the top of trees to make it easier for them to land with their 170 cm wingspan. **EGGS:** The Herons start to lay from late February through to mid March. They usually lay 3 to 5 eggs which are pale blueish/green and the size of a medium domestic hen's egg. Normally they lay every other day so it can take up to 10 days to complete the clutch.

INCUBATION: The average period is 27 days. It varies according to the weather. Both parents incubate, which is quite unusual for birds. But the male does not feed the female during nesting. The eggs hatch about every other day. So initially the size of the chicks in the brood can vary significantly.

FLEDGING: The Heron chicks are usually in the nest for around 50 days from hatching. They are fed a diet of fish, frogs, crayfish and lots of other aquatic life so they grow quickly. If there is a food shortage the smallest chick will often get eaten by its bigger siblings. **POST FLEDGING:** As the Heron chicks grow they start to branch which is where they walk around the tree stretching their wings and strengthening their flight muscles. As soon as they can fly they will leave the nest. But they stay close by for a couple of weeks often nesting at the nest site. Compared to the adults, the juveniles have an all over gray appearance in their first year. The full orange beak of the adults is only present during the breeding season. You can see the heronry and enjoy all the phases of their nesting and fledging from the hide, the car park and from Legsheath Lane.

