COMMONWEALTH of the
NORTHERN MARIANAS ISLANDS

- Farallon de Pajaros (Uracas)
- Maug
- Asuncion
- Agrihan
- Pagan
- Alamagan
- Guguan
- Sarigan
- Anatahan
- Farallon de Medinilla
- Saipan
- Tinian
- Aguiguan
- Rota

* Distribution in the CNMI

NATIVE WATERBIRD

PACIFIC REEF HERON

Chuchuko atilong   Ghe're'sch'l
Chamorro   *Carolinian*

IDENTIFICATION

Pacific reef herons are large shorebirds with long bills and legs. They have two color phases, white and dark gray, the dark gray being more common. Both phases have long yellowish legs. Their bills are yellow, orange, gray, or black. They have broad wings and their necks are an S-shape when they fly. They can land and take off from the water.

HABITAT and FEEDING

Found throughout the tropical Pacific, reef herons utilize a variety of habitats including coral and rocky reefs, sand and mud flats, wetlands, grasslands, and beaches. They are commonly seen by themselves, wading in search of fish and crabs. They are expert hunters and kill their prey by spearing it, hitting it against a hard rock, or by swallowing it whole. When fishing conditions are difficult, reef herons feed on insects and sea bird chicks.
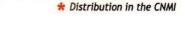
REPRODUCTION

Reef herons nest year round either in isolated patches of forests, small islets, or in wetlands such as marches or swamps. They build nests of twigs and grass in a hidden area near the ground or in small shrubs. Females lay two to five eggs and the young are born almost naked. Parents both attend to the chicks by taking turns feeding them fish. Once the young reef herons leave the nest, they must watch their parents and practice fishing before they can fly and live on their own.

THREATS and CONSERVATION

Predators, habitat alteration, over fishing and pesticides are all threats to reef herons. Rats, lizards and predatory birds feed on the eggs of reef herons. Habitats may be altered due to coastal development, agricultural practices and pollution. Over fishing of reef flats is a threat to reef herons because they are not strong flyers and cannot go very far in search of food. The overuse of pesticides is a threat to reef herons as well.

The Pacific reef heron is protected in the CNMI by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It is illegal to hunt, kill or possess these birds or their eggs without a permit issued by the CNMI Division of Fish and Wildlife.

ARTIST
DOUGLAS
PRATT

Egretta sacra

COOL SHADES

While hunting, reef herons often extend their wings. They do this to provide shade so the water is easier to see through.

FACTOID!