

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery Success Sheet No. 44

Discouraging Herons from Your Pond

Herons are a serious enemy of pond fish, and controlling these predatory birds can be difficult. They are attracted to larger ponds with walk-in shallow areas about a foot deep.

Types of Herons

The great blue heron, *Ardea herodias*, grows 3 feet tall, and there are 13 species in North America. All are gorgeous, with blues, reds, and fancy plumage.

The green heron, *Butorides virescens*, grows almost a foot tall and is not as common in built-up areas.

The night herons, such as the black-crowned, *Nycticorax nycticorax*, feed on insects, fish and amphibians. They sleep during the day and feed when the sun is low. They are 20 inches tall and very pretty.

Signs of Herons

Herons often swallow fish whole, leaving few direct signs of damage behind. The decrease in the number of remaining fish may not be obvious for some time. In these cases, the presence of whitewash (bird excrement), bird feathers, and bird footprints may be the only signs of predation.

Some fish may show scars from predatory attempts. Injured fish are vulnerable to fungal and bacterial disease organisms. Chewed or partially eaten fish may also be a sign because herons sometimes spear but do not eat fish.

Control Methods

To control predation, build steep edges to the pond, and reduce shallow areas. Reduce or remove rockwork and plants around the pond, leaving fewer places for animals to hide.

Add extra plants and animals specifically for the predator to eat. If you add, say, a few hundred rosy red minnows, then it will be so busy eating those even to bother with the goldfish or lilies. Put a lot of rocks and water plants into the pond to provide hiding spots for the fish to give them more of an advantage.

Buy a motion detector that is rigged to a water squirter. Most pond catalogs sell "scarecrow" squirters. Similarly, motion detectors rigged to noisemakers and/or lights may discourage large mammals for a while, but they usually get used to them or figure out how to avoid them.

Buy a dog and keep it outside; of course, this may not be so humane for the dog, but this method works well. Dogs are also good at keeping deer from eating your plants.

Finally, try putting a net over the pond; this provides the most protection. You can also use overhead wires or lines, perimeter fencing or wires, and metal spines.

More Information

Many books and Web sites are available on this topic. Here are three excellent sources for further information:

Backyard Gardener
<http://ag.arizona.edu/yavapai/anr/hort/byg/>

The Tribal Aquaculture Program
www.fws.gov/r3pao/ashland/mtan/mtanhome.html

Peter Robinson. *Rock and Water Gardening: A Practical Guide To Construction and Planting*. 2001.

Calla Dawson, Class of 2004

Niagara College Greenhouse & Nursery

Niagara-on-the-Lake Campus, 135 Taylor Road, Niagara-on-the-Lake, ON L0S 1J0
phone: (905) 641-2252, ext. 4082; fax: (905) 988-4307 e-mail: mnewell@niagaracollege.ca
Website: <http://greenhousenursery.niagaracollege.ca>