

Your pond to the heron is like a nut feeder to a blue tit

By Andy McConnachie from Aqua Landscape Design

POND CARE

There are many predators which can cause problems for the inhabitants of a garden pond and the grey heron is the most common.

Heron populations are on the increase and with the added pressure of habitat competition for species like the Cormorant and the Egret - more are having to turn to alternate fishing grounds; namely garden ponds. Chances are if you are not already on the flight path you soon will be and with a real bird's eye view a heavily stock pond with brightly coloured fish and crystal clear water, your prized fish are an irresistible target. Your pond to the heron is therefore just like a nut feeder to a blue tit.



Herons are highly intelligent birds; a solitary plastic heron decoy that has not moved for years isn't going to fool them!

Most pond keepers will never see a heron fishing by the pond, they are very wary creatures and tend to fish around dusk and dawn. The only sign you may have are a few disturbed plants or a rapidly depleting fish population, of which those that are left are timid and remain hidden. Once a pond has proven to be a prosperous feeding location, a heron will return until it has taken all the fish, they have even been known to take amphibians and even small mammals and birds.

It is therefore paramount that as soon as you think you might be having an unwelcome visitor, that you take action.


Covering the pond with a net can be a little unsightly and difficult around mature plants but it does create an instant barrier to protect the fish.

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During the breeding season they can actually attract another heron looking for a mate. Decoys can work as herons are solitary predators but they are best used between April and January. A heron will never usually land in the water; they stalk up to the pond to catch their pray unaware. Using garden stakes or canes, a fence can be created using connecting fishing line, especially around the areas of the pond with sparse vegetation.

This should help to discourage them by blocking easy access and escape from the pond. Other deterrents like infrared water sprays work well by working on the bird's natural "flight" instinct should anything startle it. It is important to remember that although populations are on the rise, they are a protected species and must be treated accordingly.

Kingfishers are only really a problem if you live close to a river. They will only take fish under 15cm and are easily deterred from a pond if overhanging perches are removed.

Mink are a growing problem to fish keepers too. They tend not stay in one area for very long but if they attack a pond they leave a trail of total devastation. They bite, kill or maim anything they can get hold of; disrupting plants and pond edging. This leaves a distinctly different evidence of intrusion to that of an otter who although bigger than a mink, tends to be a much more skilled and precise hunter. 

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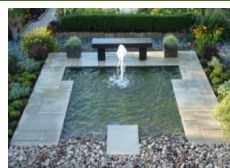


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