

All wild birds are protected by state and federal laws, with the exception of the European starling, rock (feral) pigeon, and English sparrow. This means that you cannot shoot at, trap, poison, or otherwise kill, capture or possess one without a permit. However, there are many methods available to harass and prevent problems with birds that are damaging property.

GREAT BLUE HERONS (*Ardea Herodias*)

General Characteristics:

Great Blue Herons are large blue-gray birds with long, yellow legs and a long, yellow bill. They have a white head with a black plume stripe reaching from the eye to the back of head. They have shaggy feathers on their neck and back. Their head-to-tail length can push 55 inches and their **wingspan** can almost reach 75 inches. They can tip the scales weighing anywhere from 4 ½ to almost 8 pounds. They often hold their long neck in an S-shape especially during flight.

Food Habits:

Great Blue Herons feed primarily on fish, but they will eat whatever is available, including aquatic insects, crayfish, small birds, amphibians, reptiles, rodents, and other small mammals. Herons stalk and locate their food by sight. They quickly lunge and stab the prey with their bill. Then, they usually swallow it whole.

Distribution and Abundance:

Great Blue Herons are found across Indiana along any freshwater source. They can usually be seen by small streams, rivers, wetlands, lakes, and ponds. They will even use urban retention ponds and backyard goldfish ponds.

Reproduction:

Great Blue Herons usually nests in trees near water with other herons in a colony called a heronry. They build a stick nest and line it with grass, pine needles, moss, or other dried plant material. The female will lay 2 to 6 dull, pale blue eggs. They nest once a year, unless the nest is destroyed. They will attempt to re-nest if that happens. Eggs are incubated for approximately 28 days. Both parents feed the young by regurgitating food into their mouths. Predators of eggs and nestlings include turkey vultures, crows, hawks, and raccoons. Adult herons have few natural predators because they are so large.

Prevention and Control:

When deciding what control method to use, consider how many depredating birds there are, how severe the problem is, the size of the facility that needs to be protected, and how much money your willing to invest.

Barriers

Make a complete, long-lasting enclosure over the pond with strong posts and screens or nets to exclude all predators. Make sure the enclosure is visible to prevent birds from getting tangled in it. Also, make sure you allow yourself access for maintenance and routine activities.

Partially-covered systems include overhead wire or line placed in a grid pattern over the water surface. Perimeter fencing will be necessary to prevent wading birds like the Great Blue Heron from walking into the pond. If electricity is used, it must be a non-lethal charge.

Frightening techniques

Frightening techniques rely on sight and/or sound stimuli to discourage birds from remaining at a site by making the birds believe the site is dangerous. It is short term, working a day or two, and then has to be repeated. Success is improved if the harassment is started as soon as the birds first show up. Combine harassment techniques and keep the time and location of use random. Check local ordinances and laws before using techniques indicated with an asterisk (*).

- **Noisemaking Devices**
 - Air horns or whistles*
 - Blank pistols *
 - Bangers; screamers; whistlers- specialized projectiles fired from a 15 mm launcher; cracker shells – fired from a 12 gauge shotgun; and firecrackers *
 - Propane cannons *
- **Visual Devices**
 - Motion sensor lights
 - Predator decoys such as alligators
 - Mylar tape
 - Scarecrows
 - Dogs – used to chase or run birds off
 - Remote controlled boats, cars, or planes
 - Hand held lasers *
- **High Pressure Water Spray Devices**

As contrary as it may sound, birds do not like being sprayed with water under high pressure.

 - Garden hose or sprinkler
 - Motion activated sprayer

Habitat Modification

*Make shorelines deeper on a new pond.

*Add structure on the shorelines so that fish have a place to hide.

Great Blue Herons are protected by state and federal law which makes it illegal to capture or kill them without a permit. If the birds become a serious problem, a depredation permit may be obtained through the *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Migratory Bird Permit Office* (www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/mbpermits.html).

Disease Threat

Great blue herons have been documented to carry the West Nile Virus. Contracting histoplasmosis from contaminated soil below a heron rookery could be a valid concern.