



# What to do About Pond Predators?

By Jan Schreier

## **General Tips for Protecting Fish from Predators:**

- ✓ Don't feed your fish, or feed them only with a feeding ring. (A feeding ring is a floating circular tube that is ONLY placed in the water when food is available. Once the food is gone, remove the ring.) Fish that are used to getting fed every time they see some large object approach the pond will happily swim towards a predator. Spooky fish are safer fish. The downside is that people don't see the fish much either.
- ✓ Make sure your pond has a deep end greater than 3 feet. This is healthy for fish (minimum depth for koi is recommended at 4 feet), and many predators won't swim to catch fish.
- ✓ Provide hard-scape shelter for fish to hide in. Some examples are turning a plastic milk crate upside down with a stone to weight it on the bottom. If your fish are too big for the holes, cut a few larger holes in the milk crate. Or use the crate for smaller fish and another hiding spot for larger fish. Create a stone "shelf" in the deepest part of the pond. Uprights for the shelf can be bricks, concrete block or other stones. Place a large flat stepping stone across the uprights. Fish can swim under their stone shelf to hide. Provide a length of 6" drain pipe or PVC tube and weigh down in the deepest part of the pond. If you build your pond, with this in mind, you can pre-dig a trench where this tube will lie. Leave both ends open for the fish, and weigh down with the same stones used around the pond. This tube should be at least 4 feet long to prevent tricky predators like raccoons from reaching in.

## **Raccoons – Prey upon Fish, Turtles, Frogs & Plants.**

The only sure way to remove this as a danger to fish is to build your pond with straight sides at least 3 feet deep. Raccoons will not swim in water to catch fish. While some koi enthusiasts like this shape, most of us have more natural ponds with at least one shallow end. Raccoons are really attracted to water hyacinths. We affectionately call it "Raccoon candy". If raccoons are a problem in your neighborhood, substitute other less desirable floating plants like water lettuce or caterpillar plant. Live traps are the next best solution. The stinkier the bait, the better. Old sardines work well. If you live trap Raccoons, make sure you release them in a place where you can do that legally, AND make sure it is at least 10 miles away from your pond. Raccoons have a lovely habit of finding their way "home". There are several other mechanisms that our members have had mixed success. Motion detectors can be set around the pond that either spray a jet of water when crossed, or emit an ultrasonic tone. Place loose rocks and stones completely around the pond so that they tumble & tip when stepped on. Raccoons don't like to walk across things that are very unstable. Get a dog that stays outside all night (preferably one that doesn't sleep through commotion). Or, completely cover your pond with netting. Make sure the netting is well anchored, as these crafty animals are very good at lifting a corner and wading right in.

## **Hérons/Egrets – Prey upon Fish & Frogs and can poke through the liner**

These animals are troublesome because of their patience & persistence. Ponds without stones covering the bottom can also be punctured by their bills so not only will you lose your fish, but your water as well, and then you have another problem altogether. The only sure way to prevent these from taking your fish is to completely cover your pond with netting. This is not particularly attractive, so some alternatives include stringing fishing line across the pond in a grid pattern from small stakes placed around the pond. A pond that is deeper than 4 feet everywhere will also work. However, if there are spots in this deep pond that are more shallow, the these birds will patiently wait for hours

until the fish swim to the surface or near the shallow water. Unless your pond is very large, most herons will land on shore and wade in. For this reason, a fishing line “fence” can be an excellent deterrent. String fish line between decorative stakes or poles around the pond at 15-20 inches off the ground for large blue herons or snowy egrets, and 6-12 inches off the ground for smaller cattle egrets or green herons. Other deterrents seem to have marginal or temporary success. These include the life-like heron statue. Only part of the heron’s time is defending territory. At other times (nesting season, for example) they are a communal bird. Plus, many times the statue alerts flying birds to a source of food. To better the length of time this works, move the statue around to different locations at least once a day. Motion detectors that spray water are also effective for a good period of time. We’ve had reports of some herons that have outwitted these detectors by moving SO slowly, that they don’t set the motion detector off.

### **Kingfishers – Prey upon Fish**

Make a structure over your ENTIRE pond that is less than 6 feet from the water’s surface (like an arbor), make sure you cover the bottom of the structure with netting. Kingfishers like to perch & dive. Remove all opportunities for a suitable launch site. Netting across the pond and fish line grids across the pond also work, but because the Kingfisher can’t see those until it’s too late, some have gotten entangled in them and really wreaked havoc.

### **Turtles – Prey upon Fish, Tadpoles, Plants**

You can make sure you get fish that are much bigger than your turtle, or you can net the turtle and transport him elsewhere. Live traps also work for turtles. Make sure you transport your turtle more than 2 miles from your pond or they will also find their way back.

### **Ducks – Prey upon Fish, Tadpoles, Plants, and foul the water**

Ducks in the pond cause a huge bioburden to the filtration system. The best duck deterrent is to harass the ducks frequently particularly in the spring when they are nesting. Remove eggs immediately from nest sites, and disturb the places where they rest. They usually leave this environment in a few short weeks. Others have had luck using duck decoys in the spring (borrow them from you hunter friends since they won’t need them until fall) real ducks think that the pond is “taken”.

### **Muskrats or Mink – Prey upon Fish, Frogs, Plants AND chew through liners**

The only success to muskrat/mink removal is with a live trap or poison bait. Make sure there is no possible way other animals will have contact with the bait if this is the route that is taken. Live traps need to be large enough to hold the muskrat, but have very small wiring. Muskrats can squeeze through the smallest holes! Also make sure you release a muskrat where it is legal to do so and the 10 mile limit applies here as well.

This is a basic list. If you have other things you’ve tried or failed, please let us know so we can continually update our list!