

FISH CREEK PROVINCIAL PARK

Great Blue Herons in the Park

A Home for Herons

When Fish Creek Provincial Park was created in 1975, an area west of the Bow Valley Ranch was the site of a great blue heron colony that included several dozen active nests. The large balsam poplar trees provided excellent nest sites for the birds. Records indicate that the colony was used for over 40 years.

Great blue herons are very sensitive to disruption when nesting. The area was fenced to help protect the herons from human disturbance.

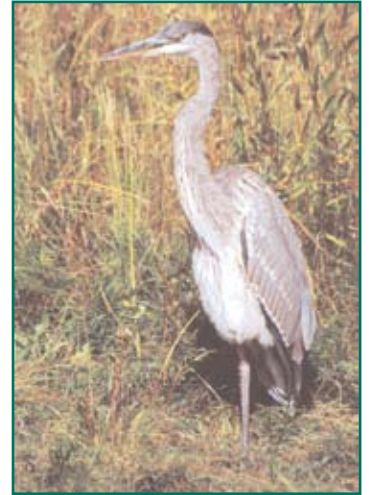
Where are the Herons Now?

The number of herons using the colony site gradually declined from 1974 to 1986. Although herons returned here in 1987 and 1988, since then none of them have used the area as a nesting site. A combination of factors may have contributed to the abandonment of the colony:

- Increasing human use along the Bow River in and near Fish Creek Provincial Park may have forced the herons to travel farther to undisturbed feeding sites.
- Construction and occupation of new communities to the north and south of the colony may have created too much human disturbance for the nesting birds.
- The trees may have reached an age or state of decay that made them unattractive as nest sites.

Do Great Blue Herons Still Use the Park?

In the summer, great blue herons can still be seen flying over the Fish Creek valley or hunting along the Bow River between Bankside and Mallard Point. Their main prey is fish, but they also eat frogs, toads, snakes, small mammals, birds, and insects. Herons have occasionally been observed hunting along Fish Creek or investigating the trees within the area. There is always hope that they will use this nesting site again.



*Photo courtesy of
Jim and Megan Sundberg*



An Important Sanctuary

The fenced areas within the Park currently provide birds and mammals with an important refuge from human disturbance. Living with wildlife means respecting their space - **please do not enter this area.**

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