

# Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) Uses Feather Lure for Fishing

Dave Norris\*



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When I first saw the heron, it was standing on the bank of a ditch holding a conspicuously-white feather firmly in the tip of its bill. At first my presence, across the ditch, seemed to make the heron uneasy, and he studied me for several minutes — first with one eye and then with the other. But to my annoyance, the heron did *not* drop the feather and give me the opportunity for the “unblemished” portrait I was after.

After satisfying itself that I constituted no immediate threat, the heron proceeded to patrol the ditch carefully watching the shallow water at the edge. The white feather remained firmly clamped in the tip of its bill. (*Photo 1*)

After a half-dozen paces or so, the heron froze immediately into a rather awkward position. (*Photo 2*)

The heron then pivoted carefully to its right toward the water . . . and deliberately dropped the white feather into the water. (*Photo 3*)

Now the bird was totally engrossed with the hunt. It assumed the rigid “pre-strike” pose common to its kind. (*Photo 4*)

Suddenly the heron struck . . . and came up with a small fish that had apparently “reacted” to the “lure-feather.” (*Photo 5*)

The heron made no attempt to recover the “lure.” This may or may not have been owing to its renewed awareness of my presence as I, ignorant of the significance of what I had just photographed, continued to change position and camera angle in a continued pursuit of a portrait shot.

In the minutes that followed, the heron caught another small fish, possibly a bullhead, without the aid of a “lure.” The heron also very handily plucked a large dragonfly from the air when it made the mistake of hovering too close to the heron’s incredible bill. Moments later the heron, continuously uneasy with my presence, flushed and flew to a spot fifty yards or so farther down along the ditch.

Note that the heron pictured is immature. If it is indeed using a lure, as I firmly believe is the case, the age of the bird is most significant. For so young a bird to have mastered such an amazing technique

\*Rt. 1, Box 600, Sebring, FL 33870.

would indicate to me that the use of this device may well be deeply-ingrained in the species.

The photos were taken with Kodak Plus-X film through a 300mm telephoto lens. The day was rather overcast with no bright light. The light conditions combined with the dark bird and busy background have resulted in rather bland photos.

The photos themselves were printed on Kodak Polycontrast RC paper — Type F/MW. I used a #3 filter and an exposure of 15 seconds. Development occurred in a 1:1 Dektol solution for 65 seconds.

The three extreme enlargements were made through a magnifying lens. Here I used the #3 filter and an exposure of 25 seconds. Development was identical to the other photos: 65 seconds in a standard Dektol solution.



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