

A SUMMER VISITOR

The Great Blue Heron

This beautifully photographed wildlife film is a portrait of a very distinctive bird, the great blue heron. Every spring this impressive bird migrates from Central America to its summer breeding grounds on rocky islands in the St. Lawrence River. The males precede the females, and either build or take possession of existing nests wedged in branches atop dead trees. Here



they await the arrival of a mate. Close-ups show the birds' intricate courtship and mating rituals, their great care of the eggs, and their co-nurturing of the newborn. Once hatched, the chicks clamor incessantly for the fish or small animals that the hard-working parents must partially digest and then disgorge for them. From the beginning, there is intense sibling rivalry, and once the chicks need

no further help in digesting their food, weaker birds tend to be pushed aside. After six or seven weeks, the juveniles are ready to try out their new wings and, as will be seen, they must learn how to land! By the end of July, the parents depart from the colony, leaving their offspring behind to fend for themselves. The young birds learn how to fish, and by early fall are strong enough for the

long flight to Central America. Young viewers will find *A Summer Visitor* immensely appealing. As well as its clear depiction of the great blue heron's major characteristics, the film transmits some of the quiet dignity of this species that, year after year, repeats a transcontinental migration. This is a classroom adaptation of the longer film, *The Great Blue Heron*.

Photography
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Produced and distributed by the
National Film Board of Canada

Color
Screening time:
13 minutes 7 seconds

16 mm: 106C 0186 010
3/4": 116C 0186 010
VHS: 113C 0186 010
Beta: 114C 0186 010

Age groups:

Grades 3 to 6

Subject areas:

Sciences and environmental studies
(wildlife/conservation)

Some questions for discussion:

1. Describe the great blue heron's nest. Why do they build them so high up in trees?
2. Which if the birds builds or finds a nest? How can you tell a male bird from a female one?
3. Does the mother or the father bird take greater responsibility in caring for chicks? How do the parents feed their offspring?

4. Describe some of the dangers young birds face when they are first learning to fly.
5. Describe the fishing methods of these birds.

Activities:

1. Find or draw a picture of the great blue heron. Add a description of its physical characteristics and its habits.
2. Describe the summer cycle of a young heron, from egg to the bigger bird that is ready to fly to its winter grounds in Central America. If you like, see the longer National Film Board film *The Great Blue Heron* in order to get more detail.



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