

Tip #12

Working with Your Wildlife Sketches



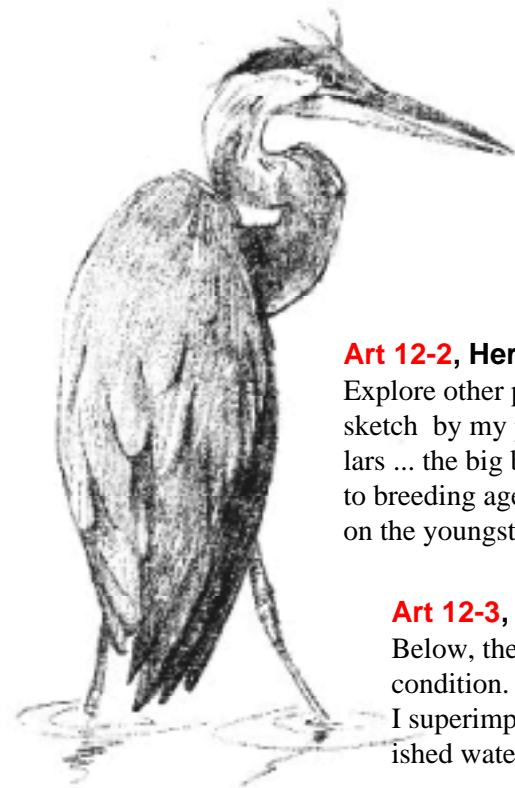
Working in nature, directly from your subject, is exciting and invigorating. You capture the essence, from life, as well as some of the detail you might not see from a photo or other source. There's a wonderful freshness to it. When painting wildlife, nothing can replace your own observations. I've always loved great blue herons, so I draw them and paint them every chance I get!

Of course, depending on what you plan to do with the finished work and what you need it for, you may need to do further research to refine your sketch into something more polished. My small sketch of the heron my vet was rehabilitating for release back into nature was of necessity, QUICK. It was also of the young heron as I saw him...not yet of breeding age, a bit scruffy (as teenagers sometimes are!) and without his mature plumage. For the book in which he was to appear, my North Light book *Watercolor Pencil Magic*, I needed to go beyond my sketch. I loved the pose and the tight focus, and felt I'd gotten the shape of his eye, his graceful, snakelike neck and the shape of the beak fairly well. The plumage needed work!

Check field guides for the best information you can find on mature plumage - the Roger Tory Peterson guides are among the best. If you're unsure of what you're looking at, when working on the spot, check details of your sketch with a member of the Audubon Society or your state's conservation or fish and wildlife department. As you can see, in the young heron's case, there's quite a difference between the mature bird and this gangly young fellow.

Art 12-1, GBH sketch

Colored pencil and watercolor washes worked well to capture this immature great blue heron, at right, as quickly as possible.



Art 12-2, Heron pencil sketch

Explore other poses and possibilities to see which you like best. This pencil sketch by my pond was done from a distance and from behind, using binoculars ... the big bird was aware of me but had not yet flown. This one is closer to breeding age, with the plumes on his head longer and more defined than on the youngster, giving me a bit more information.

Art 12-3, Great Blue watercolor pencil

Below, the heron wears the plumage of the mature male in breeding condition. The dark head and feathered "headdress" are elegant and regal. I superimposed these details over my original sketch to create the finished watercolor pencil painting.



* Other examples of painting herons and other birds appear in my *Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature* as well as the earlier *The Sierra Club Guide to Sketching in Nature*, both still in print and available from <http://www.Amazon.com>.