

Least Bittern

Ixobrychus exilis

STATUS

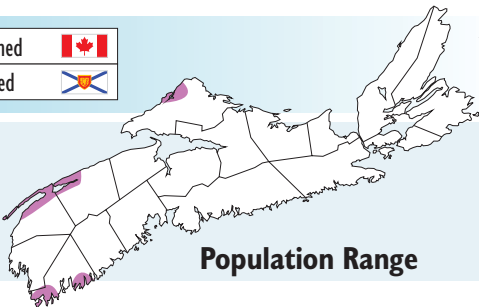
Threatened



Not Listed



Uncommonly observed near the NB border and at a few locations in southwest NS. Overwinters from Florida to South America.



Population Range

Habitat

The Least Bittern is found in both freshwater and brackish marshes that contain areas of open water (required for feeding) scattered with dense clumps of vegetation (required to build its raised platform nests). It is associated with areas of tall vegetation (typically dominated by cattails) and stable water levels which prevent nests from flooding and favour optimal foraging conditions. Breeding has not been confirmed in NS but is possible. It arrives back in Canada in May and migrates south in early September.



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Species Description

The Least Bittern is a small, robin-sized, wading bird (30 cm long) with a long neck and bill. Males and females are similar in appearance with the exception of the colouration along the back and crown, which is dark black in males and orangey-brown in females and juveniles. All have brown wings with a buff patch and white undersides with light brown vertical streaks. Males also have black on their wings.



Female

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© WESLEY PITTS



Not often observed due to its secretive habits and ability to blend in. Its presence is typically determined by hearing its "coo-coo-coo" call.

Interesting Points

- Is the smallest heron species in North America and only slightly bigger than a robin!
- Found in pristine marshes; their presence indicates high quality habitat.
- Feeds on small fish, insects, salamanders, and frogs.
- When alarmed, all bittern species will freeze and point their bill upwards to blend in with surrounding vegetation.



Similar Species

American Bittern:

At least twice as big (60-85 cm) with brown, tan and white colourations (no black or orangey-brown). Deep "oong-ka-choonk" call.



Green Heron:

Larger with dark wings (velvet-green in adults and green-grey in juveniles). No orangey-brown colouration. Harsh "skeow" call.



Threats to Survival

- Habitat loss, fragmentation, and degradation (wetland draining, filling and dyking).
- Impaired water quality (sediment, nutrients, toxins).
- Invasive marsh plants that outcompete cattails (Reed Canary Grass, Common Reed, etc).
- Inappropriately regulated water levels.
- Human disturbance (development, disruption, collision with cars and fences, recreational activities).

How You Can Help

Promote wetland conservation. Give these birds the space and solitude required to feed and raise their young. They spook easily and are not able to endure disturbances such as habitat alteration, bright lights, loud noises, or boat wakes. Participate in Bird Studies Canada's Maritimes Marsh Monitoring Program. Landowners, farmers and industries around large marshland can practice proper nutrient and sediment management practices.



Maritimes Marsh Monitoring Program

Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: Environment Canada (506) 364-5044 or www.ec.gc.ca

Info: www.sararegistry.gc.ca, www.allaboutbirds.org

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings, eBird.org

Stewardship: Maritimes Marsh Monitoring Program www.bsc-eoc.org/birdmon/mmp/main.jsp