

American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*)

Pennsylvania Endangered Bird Species

State Rank: S1B (critically imperiled) Global Rank: G4 (apparently secure)

Identification

This large, cryptically-colored heron is most often seen when flushed from marshes. It's most easily identified by its large size-up to 34 inches tall and with a 50-inch wingspan-and its streaked brown plumage. At rest, its black moustache-like cheek markings are diagnostic. In flight, conspicuous black outer wings are characteristic. The secretive American bittern may be best known for its habit, when it feels threatened, of standing standing upright with its bill pointing upward. At times it even sways from side to side, moving like the tall reeds and grasses surrounding it. In this pose the bird blends in with its surroundings and easily goes unnoticed.

Biology-Natural History

American bitterns nest in marshes across the northern United States and southern Canada. They winter across the southern United States and down through Mexico and Central America. They nest singly, not in colonies like many other other herons. This may be found the year round in Pennsylvania, but bitterns are most often seen here during spring and fall migrations. A few nest in scattered marshes across Pennsylvania, particularly, in the Pymatuning area, in our northwest corner. American bitterns build platform nests of reeds and grasses near the water, and normally lay a clutch of three to seven buff- or olive-brown eggs. Young hatch in 24 to 28 days and leave the nest after another two weeks. They are often seen stalking along shorelines and marshes where they prey on frogs, fish, snakes, crayfish, insects and other aquatic organisms.



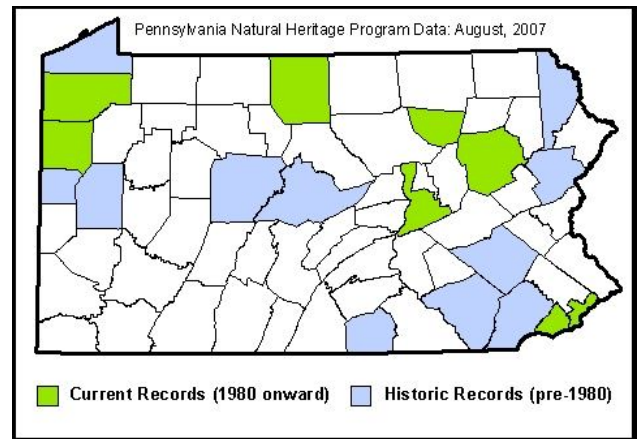
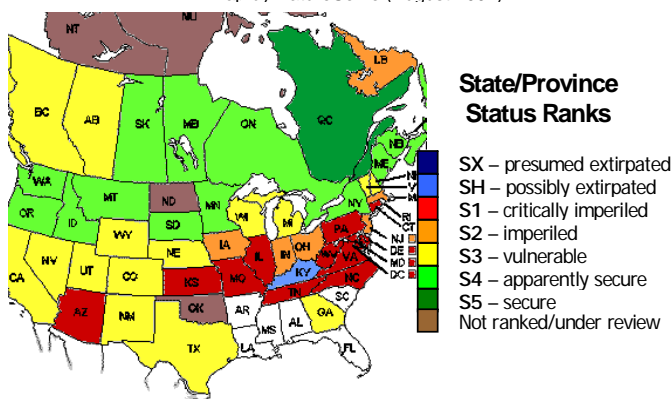
Photo Credit: Mary Tremaine, Cornell Lab. of Ornithology

Habitat

American bitterns require wetland habitats. They are most likely found in marshes and wetland borders along lakes, ponds, rivers and streams.

North American State/Province Conservation Status

Map by NatureServe (August 2007)



Reason for Being Endangered

The American bittern is considered threatened because of the continuing disappearance of the wetland habitats it needs to exist.

Management Practices

Areas in Pennsylvania where American bitterns regularly nest need to be identified and, where possible, protected from development.

References:

- NatureServe. 2007. NatureServe Explorer: An online encyclopedia of life [web application]. Version 6.2. NatureServe, Arlington, Virginia. Available <http://www.natureserve.org/explorer>. (Accessed: August 21, 2007).

