

Least Bittern

Ixobrychus exilis



Status: **Threatened**

Threats:

- ◆ Loss of wetlands
- ◆ Disturbance of nest areas by activities such as boating
- ◆ Collision with cars and electric power lines
- ◆ Habitat loss due to invasion of European Common Reed



Photo: James Kamstra



Photo: USGS

Description:

- ◆ Small heron 28-36 cm in size
- ◆ Buff-coloured feathers with dark brown on head and back; white streaking on the breast
- ◆ Long neck and bill; bill is yellow with dark upper edge
- ◆ Legs pink at top, green in front, and yellow behind
- ◆ Pale yellow eyes
- ◆ Large chestnut patches on wings when seen flying
- ◆ Males are darker than females
- ◆ Call is a low "coo-coo-coo"

Biology:

- ◆ Secretive behaviour and solitary lifestyle
- ◆ Builds its nest on a clump of dried marsh vegetation barely above water level
- ◆ Clutch size varies from 2 to 6 (usually 4 or 5) bluish- or greenish-white eggs
- ◆ Its small size and ability to straddle and climb reeds allows it to feed in waters too deep for wading herons
- ◆ Primarily feeds on fish
- ◆ Very secretive behaviour make them difficult to spot

Habitat:

- ◆ Lives in large (over 5 ha) quiet freshwater marshes with dense tall aquatic vegetation (i.e. cattails) interspersed with clumps of woody vegetation and open water
- ◆ May be seen at the base of cattails at the edge of the water

Species at Risk
STEWARDS' GUIDE SERIES

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Ixobrychus exilis

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Least Bittern on Your Property? *Here's What You Can Do:*

- ◆ **Don't disturb nests, young or adults.** Be respectful and observe from a distance.
- ◆ **Support the protection of wetlands.**
- ◆ **Avoid wetland areas with your motor boat.** If you must travel near wetlands, reduce speed so that no wake is produced.
- ◆ **See or hear a Least Bittern?** Submit your sighting to the Natural Heritage Information Centre at nhic.mnr.gov.on.ca/MNR/nhic/species/species_report.cfm. Photographs with specific locations or mapping coordinates are always helpful.
- ◆ **Contact the Ministry of Natural Resources.** If you find a Least Bittern or a nest on your property, you may be eligible for stewardship programs that support the protection and recovery of species at risk and their habitats. Contact the MNR for more information.
- ◆ **Learn More.** Check out the Species at Risk section on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at www.mnr.gov.on.ca.



Photo: Ted Krug



Photo: Eleanor Kee Wellman

Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*

Ontario's *Endangered Species Act, 2007* came into force on June 30, 2008, making Ontario a North American leader in the protection of species at risk and their habitats.

Compared to Ontario's previous Act, written in 1971, the new ESA 2007 provides:

- ◆ Science-based assessment of species' status
- ◆ Automatic protection of a species and its habitat once it's listed as endangered or threatened
- ◆ Broader protection for species at risk and their habitats
- ◆ Greater support for volunteer stewardship efforts of private landowners, resource users, and conservation organizations
- ◆ A commitment to recovery of species through recovery planning
- ◆ Greater accountability, including government reporting requirements

Ontario is home to more than 30,000 species, most of which have stable populations.

However, more than 180 species in Ontario, 34 of which are found in Parry Sound-Muskoka, are currently considered "at risk" because of threats like:

- ◆ Habitat loss
- ◆ Global changes in insect populations
- ◆ Pollution
- ◆ Invasive species
- ◆ Climate change
- ◆ Over-harvesting
- ◆ Road mortality



Learn more about Species at Risk on the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources website at www.mnr.gov.on.ca.