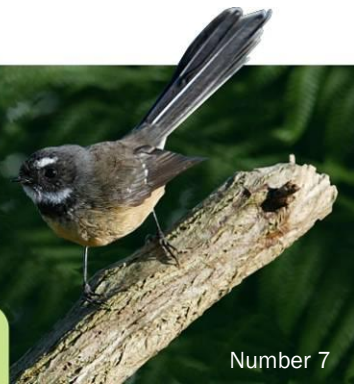


# Biodiversity



Number 7

## Australasian bittern (*Botaurus stellaris poiciloptilus*)

### DESCRIPTION

The Australasian bittern is a nationally endangered heron-like bird which is mottled brown, with long legs and neck reaching to about 70cm and weighing about 1.4kg (male) and 1kg (females).

More often seen than heard, these birds are furtive by day, camouflaged among the reeds, but at nightfall a booming territorial call can be heard around swamplands.

### DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

They are partly nocturnal birds and prefer to inhabit shallow, densely vegetated wetlands where they can hide in the raupo, reeds and scrub by standing still and blending in. They feed on frogs, fish, eels, freshwater crustacean, mice and young birds present in the wetlands.

Breeding season for these birds is June to February. During breeding males produce a booming sound in the evenings to attract females and to guard their territory from other males. Once mated the male defends the territory while the female incubates the eggs and then feeds the hatchlings.

### AUSTRALASIAN BITTERN IN TARANAKI

The demise of large areas of wetlands in Taranaki has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the abundance of bittern. Small numbers of birds continue to survive in the remaining wetland habitats and individuals are occasionally seen on pasture fringes of wetlands, often in their classic vertical bittern stance.



### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Help protect native wetlands.
- Donate your time to a local conservation group.
- Set traps to control invasive predators.
- Create, protect and retire wetlands on your property.
- Report sightings to the Taranaki Regional Council or the Ornithological Society NZ Regional Representative Barry Hartley (barry\_hartley@xtra.co.nz).



### CONSERVATION

The Australasian bittern is a threatened species and is listed as 'nationally endangered'. Studies from 1980 found 600-700 birds thinly scattered in the North and South Island, but numbers have most likely fallen since then.

### THREATS

The primary cause of past and ongoing decline of Australasian bittern in New Zealand is wetland drainage and degradation. Also predation on young birds and eggs by introduced predators.

### QUICK FACTS

- Feathers of the bittern were sought after as trout flies, which is now illegal.
- All Bitterns are polygamous.
- Maori name is Matuku.
- Bitterns are solitary hunters.
- Native to New Zealand.
- Australasian Bittern are a protected species.