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Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

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Australasian bittern: pp 94-96.



AUSTRALASIAN BITTERN

Family Ardeidae

Species *Botaurus poiciloptilus*

Common name Australasian Bittern

Status Native

Abundance Uncommon

Size 710 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, White-faced Heron 670 mm)

Habitat A bird of wetlands and wetland verges with a preference for feeding along lakes, rivers and drain margins.

Worldwide range A cosmopolitan species with a range through Europe, Southern Africa, North and South America, Asia and Australasia. The Australasian race is found in south-east Australia, Tasmania, New Caledonia and New Zealand. In all

countries it is a difficult species to find although it has a habit of turning up in unexpected places.

New Zealand range An unobtrusive species which nevertheless has a wide range throughout New Zealand and which can be expected in wetlands anywhere in either the North or South Island. More likely to be encountered in Northland, South Auckland and the Waikato.

Description

Upperparts and underparts Brown made up of both buff shadings and dark brown shadings. **Throat** Whitish. **Bill** Upper mandible brown, lower mandible greenish. **Legs** Green.

Conspicuous characteristics

- When feeding has a hunched posture and can spend many minutes motionless in this stance.
- When alerted Bitterns have the habit of freezing and extending their bills skywards. When in this position their various shadings of brown feathering tend to line up in patterns similar to the surrounding reeds and rushes of the wetland in which they are feeding. This habit is termed “surveillance posture” as it extends the level of the bird’s eyes upwards to allow better scanning. Birds will eventually hunch back into the rushes if danger is nigh.
- Birds have a wafting flight of slow wing beats, with head tucked in and legs trailing.

Call A strange vibrating booming sound like a distant fog horn is uttered throughout the breeding season. The female’s reply is quieter. Note that booms are well spaced at between five to 20 minute intervals.

Nest A platform of broken reeds among rushes or raupo. Up to 4 olive-brown eggs are laid.

Where to find – North Island

Northland – Bay of Islands in any wetland near Kerikeri, Waitangi Estuary or Paihia. P. 282.

South Auckland – Waikato river-mouth at the landing. P. 301.

South Auckland – Miranda on the coastal verge or near wet areas. Miranda has even recorded a bird at the Miranda Naturalists’ Trust Centre. P. 302.

North Waikato – Meremere and Whangamarino wetland east from the old Meremere power station building on Highway 1. P. 308.

South Auckland – Finlayson and Falls Road, Maramarua. P. 308.

Hauraki Plains – Lake Patetonga This lake is found on the western edge of the Hauraki Plains of Highway 27. P. 308.

North Waikato – Lake Waahi south-west of Huntly. P. 310.

North Waikato – Taupiri, 2 kms on Gordonton Road on east side of road. P.

310.

Bay of Plenty – Matata Lagoon near the Tarawera River. P. 320.

Where to find – South Island

Southland – Manapouri on Blackmount Road. P. 369.

Southland – Redcliff Wetland Reserve on Blackmount Road. P. 369.

Southland – Waituna Lagoon east of Invercargill. P. 364.