

Watola, G. 2011. The Discovery of New Zealand's Birds. (3rd Edition in prep.)  
Based on: Watola, G. 2009. The Discovery of New Zealand's Birds. (2nd Edition)  
Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.  
Updated and amended text supplied by George Watola, October, 2011.  
Page numbers follow Watola, G. 2009 (2nd Edition)  
Australasian bittern: pp. 97-98.

**Australasian Bittern** (Matuku hurepo) *Botaurus poiciloptilus* (Wagler 1827), Coloniser  
May 1773 Queen Charlotte Sound, Marlborough

It was first recorded on Cook's second voyage at Queen Charlotte Sound in May 1773 (Hoare 1982), but this record was not published until much later.

Yate (1835) wrote about the Bittern: "Matuku urepo – This bird is a species of the crane; and is upwards of three feet long, and three feet in height. It dwells in swamps and marshes; and is very timid, keeping at a great distance from man, and seeming to take alarm at his first approach. The top of the head is covered with slight bristles; and the back of the scull is of a red colour, perfectly bald. Its neck and legs are long; and its food, the worms found at the roots of the bulrush. Its plumage is of a bright ash colour; and it has two tufts of finely-curved feathers at the end of the pinions, which, when the bird is feeding, are mostly erect, and when flying are depressed.

Its flight is very elegant; not from its swiftness, but from the slimness of its shape. When on the wing, they generally confine themselves to the extensive marshes with which this country abounds; and, as they are but rarely found in greater numbers than two or three together, and being very shy, they are difficult birds to obtain. The female lays two eggs, of a pale blue colour, about the size of a turkey's egg. They are not sought after by the natives, as they describe their flesh to be "tooth-breaking and bitter".

Colenso recorded it in 1842, and then Miss Stone obtained one from the Hokianga, which was described by Gray in 1843.