



Black Bittern

Ixobrychus flavicollis (Latham, 1790)

Other common names Mangrove Bittern, Yellow-necked Bittern

Conservation status

The Black Bittern is listed as a **Vulnerable Species** on Schedule 2 of the *Threatened Species Conservation Act, 1995* (TSC Act).

Description (summarised from Schodde & Tidemann 1986; Marchant & Higgins 1990)

Head and Body Length

550-650mm

Wingspan

800mm

Wing

215-238mm

Tail

75-89mm

Bill

75-83mm

Tarsus

60-70mm

Weight

300-420g

The Black Bittern is dark grey to black in colour with buff streaks on the throat and a characteristic yellow streak on the sides of the head and down the neck. The female is paler in colour than the male and the underparts are streaked with yellow, white and black.

The Black Bittern has a characteristic booming call that is mainly heard during the breeding season. When disturbed, it will freeze in a characteristic bittern posture, or will flush for cover where it will again freeze.

Distribution

The Black Bittern has a wide distribution, from the southern NSW north to Cape York and along the entire northern coast to the Kimberley region. The species also occurs in the south-western corner of Western Australia (Marchant & Higgins 1990). It is most commonly recorded at low elevation, primarily below 200m above sea level (NPWS in prep.).

In NSW, records of the species are scattered along the east coast. Individuals are rarely recorded south of Sydney and inland (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Recorded occurrences in conservation reserves

Comerong Island NR, Dorrigo NP, Ukerebagh NR, Nadgee NR, Blue Mountains NP, Scheyville NP, Catai NP, Dharug NP, Yuragir NP, Nightcap NP, Bundjalung NP, Brunswick Heads NP (NPWS 1999).

Habitat

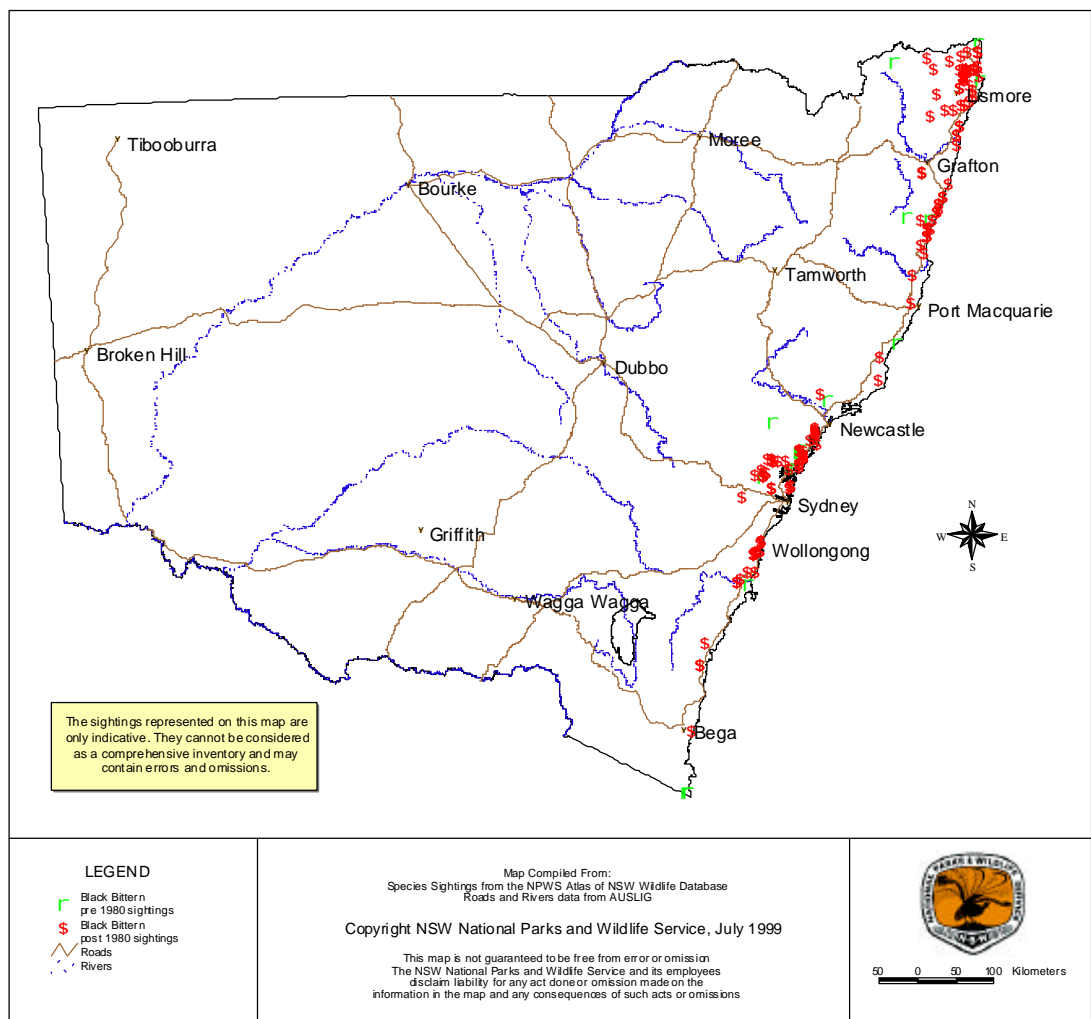
The Black Bittern inhabits both terrestrial and estuarine wetlands, generally in areas of permanent water and dense vegetation (Marchant & Higgins 1990). Where permanent water is present, this species may occur in flooded grassland, forest, woodland, rainforest and mangroves (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

Ecology

The Black Bittern forages on reptiles, fish and invertebrates, including dragonflies, shrimps and crayfish (Barker & Vestjens 1989). It generally feeds at dusk and at night (Marchant & Higgins 1990). During the day, the Black Bittern roosts in trees or on the ground amongst dense reeds (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

The species is generally solitary, but may occur in pairs during the breeding season, which is thought to be from December to March (Marchant & Higgins 1990). Nests may be located on a branch overhanging water and consists of a bed of sticks and reeds on a base of larger sticks (Marchant & Higgins 1990).

There is limited information regarding breeding. The clutch size is thought to be between 3 and 5 (Gilmore & Parnaby 1994) and both the male and female are involved in incubation and rearing of young (Marchant & Higgins 1990).



NPWS records of the Black Bittern in NSW

Threats (summarised from Garnett 1992; Gilmore & Parnaby 1994)

- Grazing and trampling of riparian vegetation by cattle
- Predation by feral cats on eggs and juveniles
- Clearing of riparian vegetation for agriculture
- Drainage, salinisation, siltation and pollution of wetlands and waterbodies
- Poor representation of preferred habitats in conservation reserves

Management

- Further research to determine the abundance of the species in NSW and its habitat, breeding range and movements

- Involvement of community groups in gathering information
- Protection and management of habitat, including fencing of riparian vegetation to prevent trampling and grazing by cattle
- Control of feral animals, in particular foxes and cats
- Development of appropriate guidelines for wetland management, including maintenance or improvement of water quality

Recovery plans

A recovery plan has not been prepared for the Black Bittern.

References

- Barker R.D. and Vestjens W.J.M. 1989. The Food of Australian Birds: Volume 1 Non-Passerines. CSIRO, Melbourne.
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- Marchant S. and Higgins P.J. (Eds) 1990. Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds. Volume 1 Ratites to Ducks: Part B Australian Pelican to Ducks. Oxford University Press, Melbourne.
- NPWS: (in prep.). NSW NPWS Threatened Species Management Manual. Forest Conservation Unit NPWS, Hurstville.
- Schodde R. and Tidemann S.C. 1986. Reader's Digest Complete Book of Australian Birds. Reader's Digest Services Pty Ltd, Surrey Hills.

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