

## American bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

Kingdom: Animalia

Division/Phylum: Chordata

Class: Aves

Order: Pelecaniformes

Family: Ardeidae

ILLINOIS STATUS endangered, native

### FEATURES

An adult American bittern is about 23 inches long. This brown heron has a black stripe on its neck. The underside of the outer wing is black. This bird has green legs. Both sexes are similar in appearance. The American bittern is an uncommon summer resident in Illinois. It winters in the southeastern coastal regions of the United States.

### BEHAVIORS

The American bittern lives around marshes, wet prairies, wet woodlands and lakes. This bird eats mainly frogs. It stands with its bill pointed upward when alarmed. This is a secretive bird that hides in vegetation and is active mostly at night. It seldom sits in a tree. The call of the American bittern is "oong-ka-choonk, oong-ka-choonk." Migration occurs at night. Like the other herons, its neck is held in an "s" formation during flight with its legs trailing straight out behind its body. Breeding occurs in wet prairies, sloughs and marshes. The nest is placed on the ground or on a platform of vegetation. Two to six brown or olive eggs are laid during the nesting period of May through June.

The endangered status is mainly due to the destruction and degradation of wetland habitats. Nests are widely scattered (partly due to the available habitat), which may contribute to its low numbers.

### HABITATS

Aquatic Habitats

bottomland forests; lakes, ponds and reservoirs; marshes; wet prairies and fens

Woodland Habitats

bottomland forests;

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none

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