

Ixobrychus exilis (Least Bittern)

Priority 1 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

Class: Aves (Birds)

Order: *Pelecaniformes* (Peleicans, Herons, Ibises, And Allies)

Family: *Ardeidae* (Bitterns, Egrets, Herons, And Night-herons)

General comments:

The least bittern reaches the northern edge of its breeding range in Maine, but it has been historically documented in here as early as 1863. It has been found at 32 sites distributed across York, Cumberland, Oxford, Androscoggin, Sagadahoc, Kennebec, Lincoln, southern Somerset, southern Penobscot, Waldo, Hancock, and Washington counties. Surveys by Gibbs and Melvin (1989, 1990) documented 18 occupied sites, of which only 4 were still occupied in 2005-2006. Our ecoregional survey efforts (1998-2009) revealed 9 individuals at 8 wetlands.

Species Conservation Range Maps for Least Bittern:

Town Map: [Ixobrychus exilis Towns.pdf](#)

Subwatershed Map: [Ixobrychus exilis HUC12.pdf](#)

SGCN Priority Ranking - Designation Criteria:

Risk of Extirpation:

Maine Status: Endangered

State Special Concern or NMFS Species of Concern: NA

Recent Significant Declines: NA

Regional Endemic: NA

High Regional Conservation Priority:

North American Waterbird Conservation Plan:

High Concern

United States Birds of Conservation Concern:

Bird of Conservation Concern in Bird Conservation Regions 14 and/or 30: Yes

High Climate Change Vulnerability: NA

Understudied rare taxa: NA

Historical: NA

Culturally Significant: NA

Habitats Assigned to Least Bittern:

Formation Name	Freshwater Marsh
Macrogroup Name	Coastal Plain Pond
Habitat System Name:	Northern Atlantic Coastal Plain Pond Notes: Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.
Macrogroup Name	Emergent Marsh
Habitat System Name:	Laurentian-Acadian Freshwater Marsh Notes: Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.
Macrogroup Name	Modified-Managed Marsh
Habitat System Name:	Modified-Managed Marsh Notes: Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.
Macrogroup Name	Wet Meadow-Shrub Marsh
Habitat System Name:	Introduced Wetland and Riparian Vegetation Notes: Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.

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Formation Name Freshwater Marsh

Habitat System Name: Laurentian-Acadian Wet Meadow-Shrub Swamp **Notes:** Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.

Formation Name Intertidal

Macrogroup Name Intertidal Tidal Marsh (peat-forming)

Habitat System Name: Acadian Coastal Salt Marsh **Notes:** Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.

Habitat System Name: Coastal Plain Tidal Marsh **Notes:** Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.

Stressors Assigned to Least Bittern:

Stressor Priority Level based on Severity and Actionability		Moderate Severity	High Severity
	Highly Actionable	Medium-High	High
	Moderately Actionable	Medium	Medium-High
	Actionable with Difficulty	Low	Low

IUCN Level 1 Threat Human Intrusions and Disturbance

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Recreational Activities

Severity: Moderate Severity **Actionability:** Highly actionable

Notes: Fishing, kayaking/canoeing can cause enough disturbance to cause nest failure or abandonment of habitat.

IUCN Level 1 Threat Natural Systems Modifications

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Dams and Water Management-Use

Severity: Moderate Severity **Actionability:** Highly actionable

Notes: Can contribute to loss of nesting/foraging habitat, but can also create habitat.

IUCN Level 1 Threat Other Options

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Lack of knowledge

Severity: Moderate Severity **Actionability:** Highly actionable

Notes: Knowledge of currently occupied wetlands is very limited; need more survey and monitoring in order to adequately protect nesting wetlands.

IUCN Level 1 Threat Invasive and Other Problematic Species, Genes and Diseases

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Invasive Non-native-Alien Species-Diseases

Severity: Moderate Severity **Actionability:** Moderately actionable

Notes: Purple loosestrife and Phragmites spp. can displace preferred native emergent vegetation used for nesting.

IUCN Level 1 Threat Climate Change and Severe Weather

IUCN Level 2 Threat: Storms and Flooding

Severity: Moderate Severity **Actionability:** Actionable with difficulty

Notes: Flash flooding and torrential rains can cause nest failure.

Species Level Conservation Actions Assigned to Least Bittern:

None. *Only species specific conservation actions that address high (red) or medium-high (orange) priority stressors are summarized here.*

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Conservation Actions Associated with the Marsh birds Guild:

Conservation Action	Category:	Biological Priority:	Type:
Implement targeted surveys to better understand the distribution and status of this species and to help direct conservation actions to newly documented populations	Survey and Monitoring	high	new

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Lack of knowledge

Conservation Action	Category:	Biological Priority:	Type:
Work with landowners to maximize hemi-marsh conditions and maintain stable water levels.	Habitat Management	high	new

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Dams and Water Management-Use

Conservation Action	Category:	Biological Priority:	Type:
Work with landowners to develop and post signs or other strategies for discouraging recreational users from disturbing nesting birds.	Species Management	moderate	new

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Recreational Activities

Broad Taxonomic Group Conservation Actions:

Additional relevant conservation actions for this species are assigned within broader taxonomic groups in Maine's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4, Table 4-1.

Habitat Based Conservation Actions:

Additional conservation actions that may benefit habitat(s) associated with this species can be found in Maine's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4, Table 4-15. Click on the Habitat Grouping of interest to launch a habitat based report summarizing relevant conservation actions and associated SGCN.

The Wildlife Action Plan was developed through a lengthy participatory process with state agencies, targeted conservation partners, and the general public. The Plan is non-regulatory. The species, stressors, and voluntary conservation actions identified in the Plan complement, but do not replace, existing work programs and priorities by state agencies and partners.