



Birds

# Least Bittern

*Ixobrychus exilis*

Priority 1 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)

Class: Birds (*Aves*)

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

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

## General comments:

The Least Bittern is the smallest of Maine’s herons and likely the most secretive marsh bird in the state. Adult males have a dark green, almost black crown and back with a pale neck and belly striped with chestnut and white; females and juveniles are more uniformly buff or brownish. Maine is at the northern edge of the Least Bittern’s range. They are typically found in freshwater marshes dominated by cattails, but can also inhabit brackish coastal marshes and are most abundant in the central part of the state. They have never been very abundant in Maine, and the number of occupied sites has dwindled over the last 35 years. Surveys use call playback methods, but not all birds respond and may go undetected. Their presence is impacted by wetland loss and degradation, as well as human disturbance during nesting.

## Species Conservation Range Maps:

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

Subwatershed Map: [Ixobrychus exilis\\_HUC12.pdf](#)

## SGCN Priority Ranking - Designation Criteria:

<b>Risk of Extirpation:</b>	<b>Maine Status:</b> Endangered	<b>Federal Status:</b> None	<b>IUCN Red List Status:</b> None
<b>High Regional Conservation Priority:</b>	<b>Partners In Flight:</b> Regional Concern: Yes, Regional Stewardship: , Regional Importance: Yes, Continental Importance: No  <b>North American Waterbird Conservation Plan:</b> High Concern		

## Habitat Associations:

**Formation:** Freshwater Marsh

**Macrogroup:** Atlantic & Gulf Coastal Plain Wet Prairie & Marsh

**Habitat System:** Northern Atlantic Coastal Plain Pond  
*Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.*

**Macrogroup:** Eastern North American Marsh, Wet Meadow & Shrubland

**Habitat System:** Introduced Wetland and Riparian Vegetation  
*Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.*

**Habitat System:** Laurentian-Acadian Freshwater Marsh  
*Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.*



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**Formation: Freshwater Marsh**

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

**Macrogroup: Modified-Managed Marsh**

**Habitat System:** Modified-Managed Marsh  
*Nest and forage in emergent marshes, both freshwater and brackish.*

**Formation: Intertidal**

**Macrogroup: Intertidal Tidal Marsh (peat-forming)**

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

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

**Threats**

Threat 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.



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**IUCN Level 1 Threat    Other Options**

**IUCN Level 2 Threat: Lack of knowledge**

<b>Severity:</b> Moderate Severity	<b>Actionability:</b> Highly Actionable
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**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    Residential and Commercial Development**

**IUCN Level 2 Threat: Commercial and Industrial Areas**

<b>Severity:</b> Moderate Severity	<b>Actionability:</b> Highly Actionable
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**Notes:** Many nesting areas are within IWWH, however, the 250 ft upland area is not a no-build zone and thus development that negatively impacts the wetland habitat and quality can be permitted.

**IUCN Level 2 Threat: Housing and Urban Areas**

<b>Severity:</b> Moderate Severity	<b>Actionability:</b> Highly Actionable
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**Notes:** Many nesting areas are within IWWH, however, the 250 ft upland area is not a no-build zone and thus development that negatively impacts the wetland habitat and quality can be permitted.

**IUCN Level 1 Threat    Transportation and Service Corridors**

**IUCN Level 2 Threat: Roads and Railroads**

<b>Severity:</b> Moderate Severity	<b>Actionability:</b> Highly Actionable
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**Notes:** Many nesting areas are within IWWH, however, the 250 ft upland area is not a no-build zone and thus development and associated roads that negatively impacts the wetland habitat and quality can be permitted. Road maintenance can have negative impacts if done during the nesting period.

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

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

<b>Severity:</b> Moderate Severity	<b>Actionability:</b> Moderately Actionable
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**Notes:** Purple loosestrife and Phragmites spp. can displace preferred native emergent vegetation used for nesting.



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**IUCN Level 1 Threat Climate Change and Severe Weather**

**IUCN Level 2 Threat: Changes in Precipitation and Hydrological Regimes**

<b>Severity:</b> Moderate Severity	<b>Actionability:</b> Actionable with Difficulty
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**Notes:** Flash flooding and torrential rains can cause nest failure.

**IUCN Level 2 Threat: Storms and Severe Weather**

<b>Severity:</b> Moderate Severity	<b>Actionability:</b> Actionable with Difficulty
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**Notes:** Flash flooding and torrential rains can cause nest failure.

**Species Level Conservation Actions:**

*Only species specific conservation actions that address high (red) or medium-high (orange) priority threats are summarized here.*

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop and implement a Species Conservation Plan.	Species Management	high	new

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Lack of knowledge

**Conservation Actions Associated with the Marsh birds Guild:**

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Implement targeted surveys and regular monitoring to better understand the distribution and status of secretive marsh birds and to help direct conservation actions to newly documented populations. Explore innovative methods such as autonomous recording units (ARUs).	Survey and Monitoring	high	new

**Threat(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

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Dams and Water Management-Use



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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

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Recreational Activities

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop outreach tools for promoting ethical wildlife observation and share with boaters and birders.	Public Outreach	moderate	new

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Recreational Activities

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
Develop Best Management Practices that are compatible with the needs of the marsh birds and other wetland wildlife, distribute to landowners and via ER and Beginning with Habitat, and make readily available on IFW website.	Habitat Management	high	new

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Invasive Non-native-Alien Species-Diseases
- Dams and Water Management-Use
- Roads and Railroads
- Commercial and Industrial Areas
- Housing and Urban Areas

Conservation Action	Category	Biological Priority	Type
For marsh birds that are hunted in the Atlantic Flyway, work with other states, provinces, and territories to support development of population models to ensure sustainable harvest. This may involve implementing a flyway monitoring program; improving the Harvest Information program; improving the rails and snipe parts collection survey; and determining breeding origin of species that are harvested at high-harvest locations.	Species Management	high	new

**Threat(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action**

- Lack of knowledge
- Hunting and Collecting Terrestrial Animals

**Broad Taxonomic Group Conservation Actions:**

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

**Habitat Based Conservation Actions:**



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### Priority 1 SGCN

Additional conservation actions that may benefit habitat(s) associated with this species can be found in Maine's Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4. 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, threats, and voluntary conservation actions identified in the Plan complement, but do not replace, existing work*