

# Bittern on the Brink!



A secretive bird with a fog-horn like booming call, they are more often heard than seen.

## Bittern or matuku hūrepo are camouflage experts!

Their distinctive "freeze" stance when disturbed and streaky brown-grey plumage helps them to camouflage into the reeds when disturbed. In fact they are so good at doing this that despite their large size, most people have never seen one.



Photo: Mike Cadogan



Photo: Kieran Pullman

Breeding occurs from June to February and this is when the males can be heard 'booming' like a fog-horn in the evenings or on dull days.

Their booming attracts females and helps to guard their territory from other males.

While male bittern are famous for these loud fog-horn like BOOMS, females are mostly silent but do make bubbling noises as they return to their nests and the odd alarm call if disturbed.

Few bittern nests have ever been found. Secretive female bittern make clever platform nests out of reeds and rushes near the waters edge.

They lay 3-5 eggs from August to December and incubate them for around 25 days. Only the female rears the young until fledging occurs from November to May.

Bittern look a bit weird when they fly - as they retract their necks in, instead of flying with it stretched out like other birds.



Bittern/matuku are water birds. They can be found lurking amongst wetland reeds and rushes, standing bolt upright in flooded paddocks and searching for tasty treats in roadside drains.

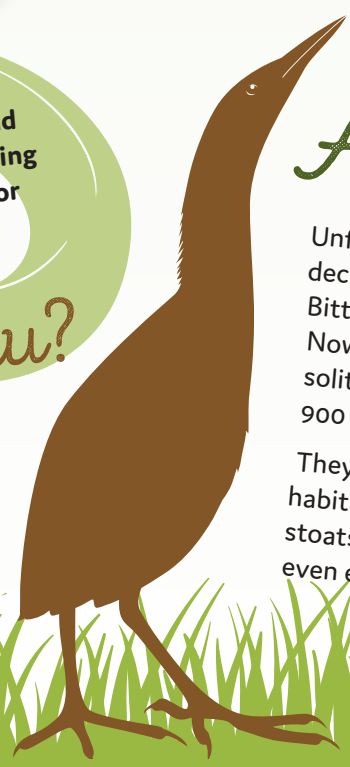
## What's on the menu?

Bittern feed on fish (including eels), small birds, mice, frogs, lizards, koura, molluscs, spiders and insects. They like to be able to see their toes in clear, shallow water as they patiently stalk their prey - so good water quality is vital.

## Almost Gone!

Unfortunately bittern numbers are low and decreasing - they are on the brink of extinction. Bittern/Matuku once gathered in large flocks. Now when they are spotted, it is usually as solitary figures. It is estimated that there are just 900 bittern left in New Zealand.

They've lost their homes to wetland drainage and habitat clearance. Introduced pests such as rats, stoats and feral cats predate adults and chicks, even eating their eggs in the nest.



# How to help bring Bittern back from the brink!

A new '**Matuku Mahi**' initiative is now gearing up across Te Tai Tokerau involving Kiwi Coast, the Department of Conservation, Northland Regional Council, Fish & Game and the QEII National Trust. The aim is to work together to find out how many bittern we have left in Northland and what we can do to help boost their numbers back to a healthy and robust population.

## Get involved!

Report bittern sightings, calls and known regular bittern locations to Kiwi Coast or Northland Regional Council

Bittern like shallow water with plenty of reed or rush-like vegetation. They need permanently wet areas they can feed in year-round and good, safe places free from animal pests and predators to nest and raise their young.

## You can help by:

Creating and restoring wetlands within your local area. Matuku have lost 90% of their habitat and the remaining 10% is degraded and under threat.

Fencing off existing wetlands and waterways to provide permanently wet areas and a good food supply year round. The Northland Regional Council's Environment Fund can help with the costs of wetland fencing.

Find out more here: <https://www.nrc.govt.nz/your-council/work-with-us/funding-and-awards/for-landowners/environment-fund/>

Legally protecting your wetland. QEII can help with fencing and survey costs. See [www.openspace.org.nz](http://www.openspace.org.nz)

Encouraging native wetland plants like rāupo and reeds and planting a buffer around the edges of ponds, wetlands and streams.

Controlling predators in and around any sites matuku use or visit

Champion the protection of wetlands and improving the quality of our waterways

Report bittern sightings to Kiwi Coast.

**KIWI  
COAST**

Go to [kiwicoast.org.nz/bittern-matuku-hurepo](http://kiwicoast.org.nz/bittern-matuku-hurepo) for more info.

