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Kale, H. W., II, B. Pranty, B. M. Stith, and C. W. Biggs. 1992. The atlas of the breeding birds of Florida. Final Report. Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission, Tallahassee, Florida.

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American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

The American Bittern is well known for its ability to mimic surrounding vegetation by freezing in an upright position when alarmed. It breeds from southeastern Alaska south to California, across the central United States to eastern Maryland and Virginia, and casually in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida.

Habitat. The American Bittern inhabits freshwater marshes and the edges of lakes and ponds with tall aquatic vegetation, such as cattails or maidencane.

American Bitterns feed principally on crayfish and frogs, although insects, small fish, lizards, snakes, and small mammals are also taken (Howell 1932).

The nest, built on the ground or on a slightly raised platform of thick vegetation, is a pile of dried reeds or similar plant material. Two to 5 buffy-brown to deep olive-buff eggs comprise a clutch. The first 4 eggs are laid at 1-day intervals, with a 2-day interval for the fifth (Harrison 1978). Incubation, solely by the female, takes 24 to 29 days. The young leave the nest after about 2 weeks, but the age at first flight is not known (Ehrlich et al. 1988).

Seasonal Occurrence. According to Stevenson and Anderson (1994) the American Bittern is a generally rare to casual winter resident throughout Florida and an occasional summer resident. The species may be locally common in the Everglades (Frederick, pers. commun.). Howell (1932) considered it "moderately common" in winter in marshes throughout the state, except in the Keys. Most birds leave the state in the spring; however, rarely, a few remain in Florida to breed.

Status. It is difficult to determine the breeding status of this bird because of its cryptic plumage, camouflaged nest, secretive habits, and inaccessible haunts.

Howell (1932) listed confirmed breeding records from Alachua, Brevard, Hillsborough, and Dade counties and from Lake Apopka and Chokoloskee. In 1989 2 American Bittern nests with young were reported from Glades County. These seem to be the first reports of nesting since the late 1920s (Howell 1932), although eggs or specimens of birds have yet to be collected from Florida (Stevenson and Anderson 1994). The Atlas project did not accept these records, but it is hoped that details of these sightings will be published.

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