

Little Bittern

Regno: fauna

Birds

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Little Bittern - *Ixobrychus minutus*

The Little Bittern is the smallest of the Heron Family. More or less the same size as a pigeon, it is a shy bird with crepuscular habits.

It is easily recognizable on account of its small size and is the only representative of the heron family to exhibit sexual dimorphism: the male sports brighter colours with black upper parts, whilst the female has a brown, more mimetic plumage.

Extremely well adapted to life in the cane thickets, it can easily be seen during its short flights as it heads for its feeding grounds, usually more to the margins of the thickets than where it nests. The nest, built of thick vegetation, is anchored to the reed stems.

The Little Bittern is a long distance trans-Saharan migrant, frequenting Europe from March to October and passing the winter months in equatorial Africa.

The males are territorial and during spring and summer, especially at dusk and night, emit their characteristic vocalisations which sound vaguely like a dog barking.

Like the much larger Bittern, when alarmed it assumes a mimetic defence posture by stretching its neck and head upwards to imitate reed and cane stems.

As it is associated with mature reed stands, the species is under serious threat from summer fires and premature scything of the cane thickets.

Source URL: <http://www.zoneumidetoscane.it/en/little-bittern>

Links:

[1] http://www.zoneumidetoscane.it/sites/default/files/tarabusino_2.jpg