THE LITTLE BITTERN IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA
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Notwithstanding its choice of habitat and unobtrusive habits, the paucity of records indicate that the Little Bittern \textit{Ixobrychus minutus} is a very rare bird in South Australia. From material published in the \textit{South Australian Ornithologist} the earliest known record of this species for the State was of the remains of a bird found on the Moorook bowling green by S. Sanders Jr. c.1915 and subsequently identified by Captain S. A. White (21:67, 1955). Then in January, 1930, J. B. Hood saw two birds at Bool Lagoon, although he was not certain of the species’ identity until March, 1932, when his dog captured one of five birds flushed. The first nest found, containing four heavily incubated eggs, was on 8 January, 1931. Hood had many sightings, mostly of single birds, in the early 1930s and found several nests. He considered the species ‘rare’ (\textit{ibid}, 12:186-7, 1934.) His last report, although probably not his last recording, was of an immature bird obtained on 4 January, 1935 (\textit{ibid}, 13:109, 1935). D. W. Brummit also recorded the species at Bool Lagoon, in November, 1933 (\textit{ibid}, 12:173, 1934) and found three nests containing eggs on 30 December, 1936 (\textit{ibid}, 14:45, 1937). To conclude the published data on this area, A. R. Attiwill in his paper ‘Birds breeding in Naracoorte District, 1941-1971’ stated of the Little Bittern, “December only month when eggs recorded. Very rare.” (\textit{ibid}, 26:60, 1972).


Just across the eastern border there are records of the Little Bittern from Broken Hill, a specimen found by J. Paul, 20 March, 1944 (\textit{ibid}, 17:44, 1944) and from the lower reaches of the Glenelg River in Victoria, Claude Austin reporting a bird that had been caught in a trap in 1949 (\textit{ibid}, 20:14, 1951).

Specimens from South Australia in the South Australian Museum are from:—

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Collector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bool Lagoon</td>
<td>4-1-1935</td>
<td>J. B. Hood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradise</td>
<td>19-10-1938</td>
<td>Miss Short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punyelroo</td>
<td>22-9-1940</td>
<td>C. Blewitt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrung</td>
<td>12-5-1950</td>
<td>J. Addison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrung</td>
<td>11-10-1954</td>
<td>W. Ayres</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cowell</td>
<td>29-8-1961</td>
<td>R. Sims</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The writer’s second recording of the Little Bittern in South Australia was on 24 September, 1975, when a male bird was observed on Spring Creek in the lower Flinders Ranges, several kilometres upstream from where the creek crosses the main road 8 km south of Wilmington. The first view was of a small heron-like bird with large buff or pinkish wing patches that flushed from a narrow but dense band of sedges...
at most 1 m high. It settled on the bank of a
dammed-up section, flew again and perched on
top of a shrub just below the dam. After five
minutes or so the bird dropped to the ground
and disappeared into other dense shrubs. Shortly
afterwards it flew back to the dam where it
remained in the open for at least 30 minutes,
being observed through 10 x 50 binoculars from
as close as 10 m. Most of the time it merely
stood at the water's edge, but occasionally
jabbed at something in the water.

The above records are from all months except
February (although the Bool Lagoon records
suggest that the species was present during this
month), April, June and July. H. T. Condon
in his *Handlist of the Birds of South Australia*
(3rd Edn., 1969), considered the Little Bittern
"Probably migratory." That there are no
records between 12 May and 29 August indi-
cates that it is a migrant, although the total
number of records is too few to be positive on
this point. The species was recorded c.1915,
1930-36, 1938, 1940, 1944, 1949, 1950, 1954,
1961, 1969 and 1975. From this it is difficult
to suggest whether the Little Bittern might be
a regular or irregular migrant to South Aus-
tralia, for it is obvious that many birds must
go unrecorded. Apart from Bool Lagoon and
the River Murray system where the species may
possibly occur regularly, all other records are
scattered over a wide area of the State, so that
Little Bitterns could possibly 'turn up' anywhere
that dense emergent freshwater vegetation
occurs.

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