

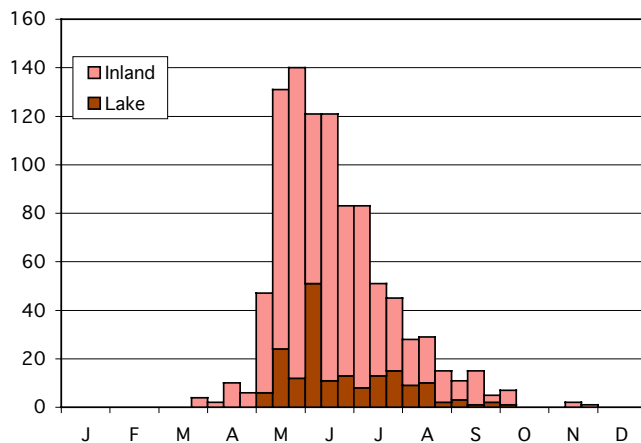
## Least Bittern

## *Ixobrychus exilis*

### Historical Information

**First Published Record:** Indiana's first published Least Bittern report involved a male collected 17 May 1888 by B.W. Evermann at Goose Pond in Vigo County (Evermann 1921).

A "Regular migrant; generally rare, but locally somewhat common; summer resident in suitable localities, [in] some place[s] common," was the characterization of Butler (1890). Keller et al. (1979) deemed it a very rare to casual migrant and casual in summer. Mumford and Keller (1984) listed it as a rare to casual migrant, which was locally uncommon.



### Status

**Physical Evidence:** At least ten Indiana specimens are housed in museums (S.F. Jackson unpublished list, J.B. Dunning unpublished computer list, and Richards 1987).

STATUS TABLE				
Specimens				
Museum				No.
Chicago Academy of Sciences				4
Chicago Field Museum				3
National Museum of Natural History				1
Indiana State Museum				1
Purdue Univ. Wildlife Laboratory				1
20-Year Abundance Table				
	Win	Spr	Sum	Fall
Northern Tier	n	7	6	7
Central Tier	n	7	7	8
Southern Tier	n	7	7	9
Entire State	n	7	6	7

### Current Status

Today this diminutive bittern is a Rare (7) migrant and an Uncommon (6) summer resident.

### Occurrence

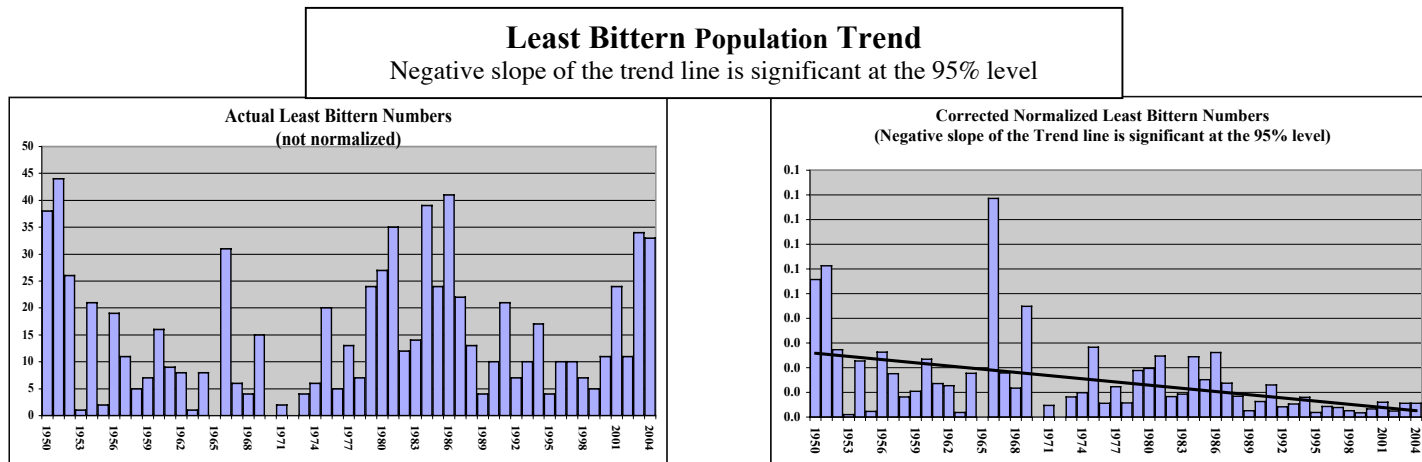
Although the Least Bittern has been recorded in 51 counties, this creature of the cattail marshes has suffered in recent decades with reduction of wetlands (see Population Trend). Despite increased observer effort numbers are considerably lower than in the 1980s. In recent years a small number has nested along the eastern margin of Murphy Lake at Willow Slough FWA, which no doubt accounts for the northern tier's Uncommon (6) status in summer. The largest single party counts in the maximum count table are no doubt below the actual numbers present, as these values reflect the number of nests, rather than birds.

### Fall Migration

The migration histogram reveals no distinct fall peak; instead the birds simply disappear. The very late autumn records involved single birds seen by C. Pittenger in Delaware County 11 November 1949 (DNR files), by J.B. Cope in Union County 14 November 1961 (Mumford files), and by J.H. Campbell in Warrick County 28 November 1981 (DNR files).

## Population Trend

Negative slope of the trend line is statistically significant at the 95 percent level.



## Breeding

The halcyon days of finding double-digit nest numbers have not occurred since the 1920s. Summaries of early nesting data are found in Mumford and Keller (1984) and Bruner (2003). A recent breeding report included two nests, containing two and four eggs respectively, which C.E. Mills found in the Buckskin Bottoms of Gibson County 31 May 1991 (Jackson 1992).

## Least Bittern Data

Maximum Single Party Counts				
All				
Number	Date	Location	Observer	Ref.
26*	14-Jun-1925	Kosciusko Co	Dr. Brooks	DNR
20	02-Jun-1916	Long Lake	H.L. Stoddard	HLS
12*	31-May-1890	Vigo Co	B.W. Evermann	DNR
11	20-May-1984	Fulton Co	T.T. Cable	IAQ
9	23-Jun-1984	Kosciusko Co	T.T. Cable	IAQ
*nest count				

Migration Envelopes						
Spring						
	Earliest	Arrive	Peak	Depart	Latest	Records
<b>North</b>	11-Apr-1985	9-May	24-May	8-Jun	10-Jun-1975	114
<b>Central</b>	7-Apr-1977	7-May	18-May	2-Jun	8-Jun-1950	88
<b>South</b>	31-Mar-1981	25-Apr	21-May	6-Jun	8-Jun-2000	31

## References Cited

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Butler, A. W. (1890) The Birds of Indiana, Appendix to *Transactions of the Indiana Horticultural Society for 1890* (available on the web).

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Evermann, B.W. (1921) Notes on the birds of Carroll, Monroe, and Vigo counties, Indiana, *Proc. Ind. Acad. Sci.*, 30:315-401.

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Keller, C.E., S.A. Keller, and T.C. Keller (1979) *Indiana Birds and Their Haunts*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 214 pp.

Mumford files: An extensive accumulation of Indiana bird data on 5x7 file cards compiled by Professor R.E. Mumford of Purdue University, West Lafayette.

Mumford, R.E. and C.E. Keller (1984) *The Birds of Indiana*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 376 pp.

Richards, R.L. (1987) The Vertebrate Collection of the Indiana State Museum: "Old" Specimens and Records, *Proceedings of the Indiana Academy of Science* 97:547-570.