

First record of Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* for Uganda

Malcolm Wilson

Première mention du Butor étoilé *Botaurus stellaris* pour l'Ouganda. Un Butor étoilé *Botaurus stellaris* a été observé dans les rizières de Kibimba, 168 km à l'est de Kampala, Ouganda du sud-ouest (00°31'N 33°52'E), le 20 novembre 2002. Cette mention a été acceptée par le Comité d'Homologation Est Africain et constitue la première donnée pour le pays.

On the morning of 20 November 2002, a Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* was observed at the 3,900 ha Kibimba Rice Scheme, 168 km east of Kampala, south-west Uganda (00°31'N 33°52'E), by members of a bird ringing expedition consisting of Barry Williams, Ian Kerton, Chris Sharpe, Nathan Eluku and myself.

We had been ringing waders, mostly Painted-snipe *Rostratula bengalensis*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* and Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, and had just finished processing the birds by 06.30 hrs, when we saw c.70 Black-crowned Night Herons *Nycticorax nycticorax* flying towards us en route to roost. An obviously larger heron flew over from the opposite direction c.30 m from us. It had a front-heavy appearance, with a thick neck and head protruding from broad, rounded shortish wings. The legs protruded about the same length as the head and neck. The plumage consisted of pale and dark tawny and buff-browns with black streaking. The bird was unlike anything I had seen in my seven years in Uganda and it took a few seconds before we realised that it was a Great Bittern. The shape and large size eliminated juvenile Black-crowned or White-backed Night Herons *Gorsachius leuconotus*. The bird flew c.100 m and landed in the next paddy, where it remained a few moments before flying out of sight.

The observation has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee as the first definite sighting for Uganda: the species is not accepted on the revised list of Ugandan birds by Byaruhanga *et al.* (2001), on which it is only mentioned in parentheses, presumably on the basis of a 'poorly documented sight record' from West Nile (Britton 1980). The species has been reported as a vagrant from Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea and north-east D. R. Congo (Smith 1957, Urban & Brown 1971, Lippens & Wille 1976, Nikolaus 1987). BW, IK,

CS and myself have experience with the species in the UK.

Other sightings of interest were two Eurasian Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia* among 30 African Spoonbills *P. alba*, constituting the fourth and fifth confirmed records in Uganda, and three Spotted Crakes *Porzana porzana* (trapped), indicating that this species might be more common than the three or four Ugandan records suggest.

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- 32 'Second Avenue', 2nd Road, Hyde Park 2196, Johannesburg, South Africa. E-mail: shoebill@mweb.co.za



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