



Piako
Waihou
Catchment Trust

MĀTUKU-HŪREPO AUSTRALASIAN BITTERN

Wetland Guardians

What are they?

Mātuku-hūrepo are large (up to 70cm), secretive wetland birds with distinctive streaky brown and beige plumage. These stocky, heron-like birds are perfectly camouflaged amongst wetland vegetation.



Why are they special?

- Critically endangered - Less than 1,000 birds left in New Zealand
- Indicator species - Their presence signals healthy, diverse wetland ecosystems
- Piako Waihou stronghold - Kopuatai wetland is one of their key remaining habitats
- Cultural significance - Important to Māori as guardians of wetland health
- Ecosystem role - Help control fish and insect populations

Physical Description

- Streaky dark-brown and beige plumage
- Dark brown neck and back
- Males produce distinctive 'woom' booming calls
- Expert hunters of fish, eels, mice, insects, frogs, and even small birds
- Masters of camouflage - freeze with bill pointing skyward when threatened

Habitat Requirements

- Dense wetland vegetation, especially raupō (rushes)
- Shallow water areas for hunting
- Tall vegetation for nesting
- Minimal human disturbance
- Rich food supplies including fish and eels



PROTECTION ACTIONS

Wetland Management

1. **Protect existing wetlands** - Fence from stock, maintain water levels
2. **Restore degraded areas** - Remove invasive weeds, replant raupō
3. **Create buffer zones** - Establish vegetation buffers around wetlands
4. **Manage water levels** - Maintain optimal depths for feeding and nesting
5. **Plant native vegetation** - Focus on raupō, flax, and sedges

Predator Control (Critical during nesting Aug-Feb):

1. **Intensive trapping** - Target mustelids (ferrets, stoats, weasels), rats, cats, and feral dogs
2. **Create predator-free zones** - Around known or potential nesting sites
3. **Dog management** - Keep farm dogs away from wetland areas
4. **Regular monitoring** - Check and maintain traps consistently

Farm Integration

- **Strategic fencing** - Allow wetland function while managing stock
- **Drainage management** - Maintain natural water flows where possible
- **Chemical management** - Avoid runoff into bittern habitat
- **Noise minimisation** - Reduce disturbance during breeding season

What to Include in Your Farm Plan

- Map existing and potential wetland habitat
- Assess current wetland condition and threats
- Plan predator control programme with timing
- Set restoration goals with native plantings
- Include monitoring for bittern presence
- Budget for ongoing management

Community Action

- Report bittern sightings to regional council
- Participate in wetland monitoring programmes
- Support catchment-wide conservation efforts
- Share knowledge with neighbouring farmers



RESOURCES + SUPPORT

- Love Bittern Project: www.lovebittern.com
- Waikato Regional Council wetland support
- QEII National Trust covenant assistance



piakowaihourestoration.org/resources

