



# Best Management Practices for Construction and Development Projects American Bittern *Botaurus lentiginosus*

**Common name** • American Bittern  
**Scientific name** • *Botaurus lentiginosus*  
**Federal status** • None  
**State status** • Endangered

## Purpose and Use

The information in this document is to be used to help avoid and minimize species impacts due to construction practices. It is not intended to be used as a guide to manage habitat for a given species. If that is the goal, please contact the Department of Conservation for habitat management information. Because every project and location differs, following the recommendations within this document does not ensure that impacts will not occur to the species and additional information might be required in certain instances. Following the recommendations within this document does not complete Endangered Species Act consultation that may be necessary for species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act; please contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for more information.

## Ecology

American Bitterns are secretive birds found in wetlands in most parts of North America. From spring to late fall, their range encompasses virtually all states and extends north into Canada. During winter, northern populations migrate to southern states and areas along the eastern and southern coasts. In Missouri, American Bitterns nest in permanent wetlands with tall, emergent vegetation such as bur-reed and bulrush. Breeding occurs between April and July, with females making nests in thick vegetation several inches above water. Clutches typically have three to five eggs. Young hatch after 24-28 days of incubation, leave the nest after approximately two weeks, and later disperse from the area. American Bitterns prey upon insects, small fish, small mammals, amphibians and crustaceans.

## Reasons for Decline

Since the 1970s, the American Bittern population has experienced a significant decline in the United States because of loss and degradation of wetland habitats. Conversion of wetlands for urban and rural development and drawdowns in spring and summer to promote migratory waterfowl habitat are the primary causes for the decline of this bird. However, siltation, chemical contamination from farms and factories, and human disturbance continue to degrade existing habitat. In addition, wetland isolation is affecting the American Bittern's ability to move between areas of suitable habitat.

## Specific Recommendations

Protection and restoration of quality wetlands are important for many species, including the American Bittern.

- Project activities should not occur within 100 feet of wetland habitat between April 1 and July 31 to prevent disturbing nesting birds.
- Erosion and sediment controls should be implemented, maintained and monitored for the duration of the project.
- Disposal of wastes and garbage should be done in designated areas far from wetlands.
- Draining or destroying permanent, emergent wetland habitat should be avoided.

## General Recommendations

Refer to Management Recommendations for Construction Projects Affecting Missouri Wetlands.

If your project involves the use of Federal Highway Administration transportation funds, these recommendations may not fulfill all contract requirements. Please contact the Missouri Department of Transportation at 573-526-4778 or [www.modot.mo.gov/ehp/index.htm](http://www.modot.mo.gov/ehp/index.htm) for additional information on recommendations.

## Information Contacts

For further information regarding species or regulations for development in rivers and streams, contact:

For species information:

[Missouri Department of Conservation](#)  
Resource Science Division  
P.O. Box 180  
2901 W. Truman Blvd  
Jefferson City, MO 65102-0180  
Telephone: 573/751-4115

For species information and Endangered Species Act Coordination:

[U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#)  
Ecological Services  
101 Park Deville Drive, Suite A  
Columbia, MO 65203-0007  
Telephone: 573/234-2132

For Clean Water Act Coordination:  
[Missouri Department of Natural Resources](#)  
Water Protection Program  
P.O. Box 176

Jefferson City, MO 65102-0176  
Telephone: 573/751-1300, 800/361-4827

[U.S. Army Corps of Engineers](#)

Regulatory Branch  
700 Federal Building  
Kansas City, MO 64106-2896  
Telephone: 816/983-3990

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#)

Water, Wetlands, and Pesticides Division  
901 North 5th Street  
Kansas City, KS 66101  
Telephone: 913/551-7307

**Disclaimer**

These Best Management Practices were prepared by the Missouri Department of Conservation with assistance from state and federal agencies, contractors and others to provide guidance to those people who wish to voluntarily act to protect wildlife and habitat. Compliance with these Best Management Practices is not required by the Missouri wildlife and forestry law nor by any regulation of the Missouri Conservation Commission. Other federal laws such as the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act, and state or local laws need to be considered for construction and development projects, and require permits and/or consultation with the appropriate agency. Following the recommendations provided in this document will help reduce and avoid project impacts to the species, but impacts may still occur. Please contact the appropriate agency for further coordination and to complete compliance requirements.