green heron

Butorides virescens

Kingdom:	Animalia
Division/Phylum:	Chordata - vertebrates
Class:	Aves
Order:	Ciconiformes
Family:	Ardeidae

Features

A common and widespread nester, an adult green heron is one of the smallest members of the heron family at 16 to 22 inches long. Both sexes are similar in appearance. It has a long, maroon neck and head with patches of white. The top of the head is black. Its back and belly are gray with olive green sides. The bill is pointed. The green heron has small, skinny, greenish legs. Like the other herons, its neck is held in an “S” formation during flight with its legs trailing straight out behind its body.

Natural History

The green heron winters from Florida to the northern parts of Colombia and Venezuela. It lives along lakes, ponds, marshes, swamps, or streams. It walks along the shoreline and eats aquatic insects, crayfish, and fish. Its call is “skeeow.” This bird migrates at night. Spring migrants begin appearing in Iowa in April. Nesting occurs from May through early July. The green heron nests singly or in small colonies of not more than 25 pairs. The nest is a platform of sticks, usually built in a willow tree. Two to five pale blue-green eggs are laid. Fall migration begins in August.

Habitats

Mississippi River; Missouri River; interior rivers and streams; natural lakes and prairie marshes; constructed lakes, ponds, and reservoirs

Iowa Status

common; native

Iowa Range

summer: statewide; migrant: statewide

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001. *Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats* CD-ROM.