

Green Heron

Butorides virescens

From a distance, the Green Heron is a dark, stocky bird hunched on slender yellow legs at the water's edge, often hidden behind a tangle of leaves. Seen up close, it is a striking bird with a velvet-green back, rich chestnut body, and a dark cap often raised into a short crest. These small herons crouch patiently to surprise fish with a snatch of their daggerlike bill.

Keys to Identification

Size and Shape

Compared with most herons, Green Herons are short and stocky, with relatively short legs and thick necks that are often drawn up against their bodies. They have broad, rounded wings and a long, daggerlike bill. They sometimes raise their crown feathers into a short crest.

Color Pattern

From a distance Green Herons look all dark. In better light they are deep green on the back with a rich chestnut breast and neck. The wings are dark gray. Juveniles are browner, with pale streaking on the neck and spots on the wings.

Behavior

Green Herons stand motionless at the water's edge as they hunt for fish and amphibians. They typically stand on vegetation or solid ground, and they don't wade as often as larger herons. In flight these compact herons can look ungainly, often partially uncrooking their necks to give a front-heavy appearance.

Habitat

Green Herons live around wooded ponds, marshes, rivers, reservoirs, and estuaries.

Cool Facts

- The Green Heron is one of the few tool-using birds. It commonly drops bait onto the surface of the water and grabs the small fish that are attracted. It uses a variety of baits and lures, including crusts of bread, insects, earthworms, twigs, or feathers.
- The oldest Green Heron on record was 7 years, 11 months old.

Measurements

Both Sexes

- Length - 16.1 - 18.1 inches
- Wingspan - 25.2 - 26.8 inches
- Weight - 8.5 ounces

