

Green Heron Research Project

One of only two Heron species nesting on Bermuda, the Green Heron has visited Bermuda for many years during migration, but has only started nesting on the island since 2002.



Project Objectives

To research the biology and breeding range of the Green Heron, which has recently naturally established a breeding population on Bermuda. This research will give a rare insight into how new species naturally colonize isolated oceanic islands

Photos by Andrew Pettit, Andrew Dobson & Jeremy Madeiros

Summary

The **Green Heron** (*Butorides virescens*) is native to Bermuda, having colonized the island naturally between 2000 and 2004. It is one of the few species for which the dates and circumstances of its colonization are well known and confirmed by scientific surveys. The Bermuda population mostly nests in **Red Mangrove trees** overhanging land-locked, brackish water ponds at the east end of the Island. There are also at least two areas where they nest in Mangroves in sheltered bays, one quite close to the capital of Hamilton.

The Project's main goals are to understand their island-adapted biology and ecology compared to those populations living along southeastern North America and the Caribbean, as well as to understand how these Herons are using their environment in terms of food items and nesting areas.

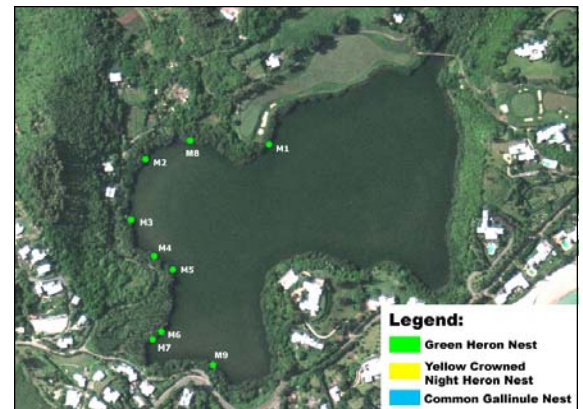
Annual surveys of the main nesting locations between 2004 and 2010 have revealed that the population has been steadily increasing in numbers, and has also increased its distribution. In 2004, 12 active nests were found at 3 locations, in Hamilton Parish only; by 2010, 25 nests were identified at 9 locations around Bermuda, from Somerset at the west end to St. George's at the east end of the Island.

Bermuda's **Green Herons** are given protection under the **Protection of Birds Act 1975**. Complete protection for the island's Mangrove swamp areas and important nesting locations will protect this 'new Bermudian' and the many other marine and terrestrial species that are also dependant on Mangroves.

Green Herons are small waterbirds that stand about 24" high, with a cinnamon-colored breast streaked with white and green back and head cap. They have a long neck and bill, useful in catching small fish, and yellow legs which turn reddish during breeding season. They often hang from waterside trees or mooring ropes to catch fish.



Green Herons build nests low in Mangrove trees overhanging the water in bays and ponds. They lay clutches of 2 to 5 eggs (left) with chicks fledging in 35 days (right)



Surveys of breeding success at major nesting sites are an important part of the research project



GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA
Ministry of Public Works
Department of Conservation Services



Green Herons can often be seen hunting for small fish from buoys, mooring ropes and Mangroves in areas such as Flatts Inlet

This research was funded by :
Department of Conservation Services



3 Green Heron chicks in nest at Mangrove Lake, Hamilton

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