



## Klamath Network Featured Creature

November 2013

### Green Heron

(*Butorides virescens*)



© Pierre Howard

**General Description:** Found stalking sheltered edges of freshwater bodies, the green heron may first appear to be a non-descript little bird. Seen in the light however, they have deep green to blue-grey back and wings, a dark crested head, with a rich chestnut breast and neck, and yellow to orange legs. Juveniles are understated, with brown and cream streaks and spots. The green heron is more compact than other herons. They have shorter legs, broad rounded wings, and a sharp bill.

**Habitat and Ecology:**

Green herons nest along wet habitats in secluded areas with trees and shrubs for cover. Breeding sites can be swamps, marshes, lakes, ponds, and even dry sites as long as there is water nearby for feeding. Winters are spent in southern range coastal areas, as well as throughout Mexico and Central America. Green Herons feed on small

fish, insects, spiders, crustaceans, snails, amphibians, reptiles and rodents.

**Behavior:**

Green herons stalk prey by standing still or walking slowly in shallow water with thick vegetation. When prey approaches the heron will dart in and grasp or spear prey with its sharp and heavy bill. Herons hunt at all times of day or night, in shallow brackish water, generally avoiding habitat frequented by longer-legged herons.



Juvenile green heron © Pierre Howard

**Distribution:**

Green Herons can be found throughout most of the eastern US during the breeding season. The western breeding range extends from British Columbia south through California and into Arizona, overwintering in Coastal California, along the Gulf coast and east along the

Atlantic coast into South Carolina. Green Herons are widely dispersed and common, the largest threat to these birds is habitat loss through the destruction and development of wetlands.

**Interesting Fact:**

The green heron is known to use objects such as twigs, feathers, or insects to lure small fish to the surface. This behavior makes the green heron one of the few bird species that uses tools!

**Where to Find in the Klamath Network Parks:**

*Butorides virescens* can be found in Redwood National and State Parks, Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, Lava Beds National Monument, and is probably present in Lassen Volcanic National Park.

**References and Further**

**Reading:**

<http://www.nhptv.org/natureworks/greenheron.htm>

[http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/green\\_heron/lifehistory-at\\_habitat](http://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/green_heron/lifehistory-at_habitat)