

## LITTLE BITTERN.

*Botaurus minutus*, *Selby*.

Le Héron blongios.

ALTHOUGH we have followed Mr. Selby in placing this bird in the genus *Botaurus*, of which the Common Bittern is the type, still we conceive that the present species (with numerous others, possessing the same form and habits, distributed over nearly every part of the globe,) possesses characters which entitle it to form the type of a genus as distinct from *Botaurus* as that genus is from *Ardea* and *Nycticorax*. It cannot be denied, however, that it is intimately allied to the more typical *Botauri* in its solitary and secluded habits, everywhere frequenting low and swampy situations, abounding in thick coverts of reeds, willows, &c., and from which it is not driven without considerable difficulty. In England it is, and always has been, a bird of considerable rarity; nevertheless various examples have been taken at different times, so that there are few collections of any extent which do not contain one or more British specimens. On the Continent it is found in considerable abundance, especially in the southern provinces; nor is it rare in Holland and France, in both of which countries it is known to breed annually. From the seclusion of its haunts, and the difficulty of access, its nest is seldom seen: it is said to be placed in low bushes and tufts of herbage, among the thickest rushes. The eggs are five or six in number, of a pale greenish white.

The compressed form of body which so eminently characterizes the Little Bittern enables it to avoid pursuit with the utmost facility, by threading its way through the most closely compacted and intricate masses of reeds, &c., which it does with the utmost silence and rapidity. Like most other Herons, it is capable of perching; and this it often does on willows, the stems of thick reeds, &c. If forced to take wing, its flight is slow and heavy, not protracted to any great distance.

Its food consists of small fishes, frogs, snails, insects, &c.

In their adult state, the sexes offer little or no external difference in the colour of their plumage. The young are wholly destitute of the fine green of the back and top of the head, which, together with the wing-coverts, are then brown, each feather having longitudinal blotches of a darker colour. From this stage it passes through several changes of colouring, until it assumes the full plumage of maturity, which is not accomplished before the second or third moult.

Adults have the top of the head, back of the neck, whole of the upper surface, and tail glossy greenish black; middle of the wings, neck, and whole of the under surface delicate fawn yellow; bill, circle round the eye, and irides yellow; tarsi greenish yellow.

The Plate represents an adult, and a young bird in the intermediate stage, of the natural size.