

## AMERICAN BITTERN.

*Botaurus lentiginosus*, Steph.

Le Butor de l'Amérique.

A BIRD of this species was shot in Devonshire in the autumn of 1804 ; and after passing through the hands of two or three persons, who were not aware of the rarity and value of the specimen, it came into the possession of Colonel Montagu, by whom it was first described and figured in the supplement to his Ornithological Dictionary under the name of Freckled Heron, *Ardea lentiginosa*, and after whose death it was transferred with his whole collection to the British Museum. It is now ascertained that the true habitat of this species is America, and that it is only an occasional visitant to this country.

Wilson, who has described it under the specific title of *minor*, says, "This is another nocturnal species, common to all our sea and river marshes, though nowhere numerous. It rests all day among the reeds and rushes, and unless disturbed flies and feeds only during the night. When disturbed these birds rise with a hollow note, and are easily shot, as they fly heavily. Like other nocturnal birds, their sight is most acute during the evening twilight ; but their hearing is at all times excellent." Wilson has also himself found and shot this species in the interior of the country near Seneca Lake, and had learned, probably from the account of Mr. Hutchins, that this bird makes its nest in swamps, laying four cinereous green eggs among the long grass. The young are said to be at first black. The stomachs of those examined by Wilson were usually filled with fish or frogs.

Dr. Richardson, in his North American Fauna, says this Bittern "is a common bird in the marshes and willow thickets of the interior of the fur countries up to the fifty-eighth parallel. Its loud booming, exactly resembling that of the Common Bittern of Europe, may be heard every summer evening, and also frequently in the day."

Top of the head dusky reddish brown ; back of the neck pale yellowish brown, minutely dotted with blackish brown ; a broad stripe of black on the sides of the neck, from behind the ears ; upper surface dark umber brown, minutely freckled with chestnut and yellowish brown ; long feathers on the shoulders broadly edged with buffy yellow ; wing-coverts brownish yellow, freckled with umber brown ; spurious wing, primaries, and secondaries greyish black, the tips of the latter, the lesser quills, and tail brownish orange dotted with black ; chin and upper part of the throat white ; front of the neck and under surface ochreous yellow with a broad stripe of mottled brown down the centre of each feather, margined on each side with a fine line of a darker tint ; bill dark brown above, sides and under mandible yellow ; legs greenish yellow.

We have figured an adult about two thirds of the natural size.