

Summary

The most important factors determining the population size of many bird species and their future breeding success are the availability of suitable habitat and an abundant food supply. The availability of wetlands, which are among the most threatened areas in the worldwide, influences the occurrence of various waterbirds. In a changing environment, some of these habitat specialists show greater environmental plasticity, changing their habitat preferences and colonising man-made areas such as fishponds. The scientific study of bird species in modified and man-made habitats contributes to their better conservation.

The aim of the dissertation was to investigate selected aspects of the breeding biology of the Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, a little-known heron species. The study was conducted between 2010 and 2013 at fishponds located in the Lasy Janowskie Landscape Park (south-eastern Poland). The scientific questions of this work concerned the specific habitat preferences, diet and feeding frequency of nestlings, intersexual differences in parental care and vocal activity of male during the breeding season. Based on the results obtained, it was concluded that: 1) the Little Bittern selects breeding habitat based on the quality of emergent vegetation patches of appropriate height, width and surface area; 2) habitat parameters for breeding and non-breeding nests (mock nest) differ to some extent; 3) the Little Bittern is a food opportunist using the most available food source; 4) both males and females have a large parental contribution to brood care; 5) the male Little Bittern shows the highest vocal activity before sunrise and sunset.

The study has contributed to a better knowledge of the breeding biology of the Little Bittern. The results obtained are of practical importance and can be used for future scientific research, population monitoring or active conservation of this species.