

PROPOSAL FOR INCLUSION OF SPECIES ON THE APPENDICES OF THE CONVENTION  
ON THE CONSERVATION OF MIGRATORY SPECIES OF WILD ANIMALS

A. PROPOSAL: Inclusion of Botaurus stellaris stellaris (Western Palearctic populations) in Appendix II.

B. PROPONENT: Government of the Federal Republic of Germany

C. SUPPORTING STATEMENT

1. Taxon

1.1. Classis	Aves
1.2. Ordo	Ciconiiformes
1.3. Familia	Ardeidae
1.4. Genus/Species/Subspecies	<u>Botaurus stellaris</u> (Linnaeus) 1758 ssp. <u>stellaris</u>
1.5. Common names	
English:	Great Bittern (Eurasian Bittern)
Spanish:	Avetoro Comun
French:	Butor etoile

2. Biological data

2.1. Distribution

Two subspecies occur in the African-Eurasian Region. The nominate subspecies breeds widely in West Eurasia and winters south to the Mediterranean, Egypt, Iraq, and occasionally in Africa south of the Sahara. B. s. capensis breeds from central Botswana and Natal south to southern South Africa, and appears to be mainly sedentary, although some seasonal movements have been recorded within South Africa. Two main migratory populations are recognized.

2.2. Population

- European breeders (wintering mainly in Europe): In the range 25,000-100,000; declining.
- West Asian breeders (wintering mainly in Southwest Asia): Probably less than 25,000; poorly known.

A general decline has occurred throughout the Western Palearctic, and especially in Europe, since the 19th century. Protection has eased the situation in some countries, but has not reversed the overall trend, and the species is now considered to be threatened throughout much of Europe. The decline continues in the Netherlands and in France, where a drop of 40% was noted between 1970 and 1983. The species recolonized Britain in 1911, but the population has declined markedly since the 1970s. The population in Europe, excluding the republics of the former U.S.S.R., was estimated at 2,500-2,700 'booming' males in 1976; the population in the countries within the EEC has recently been estimated at only 1,020-1,350 pairs. However, unpublished data suggest that the total breeding population in Europe excluding Russia is currently between 9,000 and 13,000 pairs, while the population in Russia is estimated at between 10,000 and 30,000 pairs. Very little information

is available on numbers or trends in the West Asian population, although it remains relatively common in parts of the Caspian Region. Birds wintering in Turkmenistan and Seistan (on the Iran/Afghanistan border) may belong to the West Asian population or be a part of a South Asian population covered by the Asian-Australasian Waterfowl Agreement.

### 2.3. Habitat

During the breeding season, occurs mainly in freshwater marshes with extensive reed-beds of Phragmites sp. around lakes and or along rivers. These must be comprehensively flooded and fairly shallow, with little fluctuation in water level; with a mixture of young and old reeds, and clearings where birds can feed undisturbed and unseen. Locally, also occurs in brackish marshes, and occasionally found in pure stands of Scirpus sp. Outside the breeding season, occurs in a wider range of wetland habitats, including rice fields, grassy marshes, cress beds, gravel pits, fish farms, overgrown ditches and sewage farms. A solitary breeder, nesting in the midst of dense reed-beds (del Hoyo et al. 1992).

### 2.4. Migrations

The northernmost breeding populations in Western Eurasia are migratory, wintering in South and West Europe, the Mediterranean Basin and Southwest Asia, and to a lesser extent also across the Sahara south to about the Equator; southern breeding populations are mainly sedentary, except during periods of heavy frost. However, immatures in all populations undertake extensive post-breeding movements, sometimes of hundreds of kilometres. Most migration occurs at night.

## 3. **Threat data**

### 3.1. Direct threats to the population

Hunting of adults and the collection of eggs and chicks for food have contributed to the decline in some areas. The northern breeding populations are badly affected by severe winters.

### 3.2. Habitat destruction

The widespread loss and degradation of reed-beds almost throughout the Western Palearctic has undoubtedly been a major cause of the decline of the species in many areas.

### 3.3. Indirect threats

Water pollution and the uncontrolled use of pesticides has caused severe contamination of wetlands in parts of southern Europe, and this has affected the birds through their diet.

### 3.4. Threats connected especially with migrations

None known.

### 3.5. National and international utilization

Some hunting of adults and the collection of eggs and nestlings still occurs in parts of Europe and Southwest Asia, and although the numbers taken are small, this may be having a significant effect on the dwindling populations.

## 4. Protection status and needs

### 4.1. National protection status

Protected under national legislation in all twelve member states of the EEC. In North Africa, protected under national legislation in Algeria and Tunisia.

### 4.2. International protection status

Botaurus stellaris is listed in Appendix II (strictly protected fauna) of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Berne Convention), and is also listed in Annex I of the EEC Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC).

### 4.3. Additional protection needs

The European breeding population of Botaurus stellaris is listed in the category 'Threatened' in the Draft Management Plan for the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds, because it is a biogeographical population which is thought to number less than 25,000 individuals and appears to be declining throughout all or a large part of its range. See attached note on additional protection needs for species and populations with an unfavourable conservation status.

## 5. Range States

See attached table.

## 6. Comments from Range States

## 7. Additional remarks

## 8. References

- Cramp, S. & Simmons, K.E.L. (eds). (1977). Handbook of the Birds of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa. Vol.1: Ostrich to Ducks. Oxford University Press. Oxford, London and New York.
- del Hoyo, J., Elliott A. & Sargatal, J. (eds). (1992). Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 1: Ostrich to Ducks. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
- Hancock, J. & Elliott, H. (1978). The Herons of the World. London Editions, London.

Taxon: <i>Botaurus stellaris stellaris</i>		
Population		
(a) Europe		
(b) W Asia		
State	Pop.	Status
Albania	a	W
Algeria	a	Wr
Austria	a	S
Azerbaijan	b	Wr
Bahrain	b	Wp
Belarus	a	S
Belgium	a	Wr
Bosnia & Herzegovina	a	Wrs
Bulgaria	a	Wr
Croatia	a	Srw
Czech Republic	a	S
Denmark	a	Wr
Egypt	a	W
Ethiopia	a	S
Finland	a	S
France	a	Wrs
Germany	a	Sr
Greece	a	W
Hungary	a	S
Iran	b	Ws
Iraq	b	W
Ireland	a	W
Israel	a	W
Italy	a	Wrs
Kazakhstan	b	S
Kuwait	b	W
Latvia	a	S
Lithuania	a	S
Macedonia	a	R
Netherlands	a	S
Poland	a	S
Qatar	b	W

Romania	a	Srw
Russian Federation	a	S
"	b	Sr
Saudi Arabia	b	Wp
Seychelles	b	V
Slovakia	a	S
Slovenia	a	S
Spain	a	Wr
Sweden	a	S
Turkey	a	Wr
Turkmenistan	b	Srw
Ukraine	a	Sr
United Arab Emirates	b?	W?
United Kingdom	a	Rw
Uzbekistan	b	Sr
Yugoslavia	a	Wr

Key to Status	
S/s Breeding summer visitor	R/r Resident
W/w Winter visitor	V Vagrant
P/p Passage migrant	? Status uncertain
Upper case = primary status Lower case = secondary status	