

An Observation by Wilton Corkern, May 26, 2006:

Green Herons are among the most common of the herons and egrets in our area. Yet because of their blend-in coloration and their preferred habitat of small ponds, streams and wooded swamps, we don't often see them. This species gets its name from its dark green back. Its long neck (which is usually folded on its shoulders) and its chest are rufous or chestnut, with light under parts. Its crest is dark, almost black. For the past several weeks I have made frequent observations of a Green Heron in the Accokeek Creek swamp beside Bryan Point Road. It often perches on a tree branch or snag over the water, or stands still against a backdrop of grass at the edge of a pool. It is also a bit shy, not usually hanging around to be watched by a curious passer-by.



My first attempt to photograph this latest specimen produced such a poor image that Patti jokingly accused me of trying to pass off a picture of a crow! At 16-22 inches, it is crow-sized, and in shadow it can appear very dark. The Green Heron is the smallest of the common members of family *Ardeidae*, which includes the herons, bitterns, and egrets. Only the Least Bittern, which according to Peterson's is "uncommon and secretive," is smaller. Unlike some other herons, which nest in great colonies, Green Herons pair and usually nest apart from others of the species. They feed their young for about one month after hatching. One morning this week I watched two Green Herons feeding in the swamp, and for a change they didn't seem to mind my rudeness as I stared at them for ten minutes. Maybe they were working so hard to meet the demands of a nearby brood that they simply didn't have time to notice their onlooker.