



We’ve all been waiting patiently for Spring to bound forth – and this weekend gave us a taste of warm and wonderful days ahead.

But our wildlife has been on standby too – no group more so than our birds, in particular the monarch of the marshes, the secretive bittern.

The bird, so loved it even has a rail line named after it, will any day now send its mating season boom across various remote spots in Norfolk and Suffolk.

It is an anthem to the success of various conservation movements, not least the dedicated staff of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

While still a threatened species, the bittern now has a strong claw-hold in England’s East where new breeding locations have been noted in recent years.

Doyen wildlife photographer Steve Plume took some amazing photographs of the winged wonders in the last few days and is overjoyed when he sees and hears them.

He said:” If you haven’t heard one then it is similar to blowing across the top of a bottle, very deep but

Any day now, the sound of a great East Anglian wildlife success story will echo across parts of our region. Delayed by the frosts of February and March, the evocative boom of the bittern will soon fill thousands of people with joy. Here **NIGEL PICKOVER** tells of the wonder of Mother Nature’s ghost of the reeds – and **STEVE PLUME** delivers some exquisite pictures.

much much louder.”

The bittern, a member of the heron family, is often heard and seldom seen which is quite a feat considering its size, 70-80cms tall.

Its deep boom can travel great distances across the reed beds and marshes where it lives.

On the East Anglian Coast are a number of hot spots such as the RSPB reserve at Minsmere, Titchwell and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust at Cley.

These locations have been pivotal in the bittern’s survival programme.

Said Steve: “ RSPB Minsmere has

two hides in great locations, the aptly named Bittern Hide and the Island Mere Hide.

“What really amazes me is their hunting prowess, they move through the open water without making any disturbance, completely silent and holding a position until they strike, watching this movement or lack of it is a delight. “

■ **Don’t forget if you have any wildlife stories that could be photographed please let Steve know at steve@ukwildlife.me.uk**
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THE GHOST OF THE REEDS: The bittern is one of this country’s most secretive birds, but photographer Steve Plume has managed to capture several on camera hidden away in the reeds and one, right, who gave him a long hard stare!

BITTERN FACTS

- Once so common they were regularly eaten, bitterns are now among our rarest breeding birds.
- Reedbeds at Minsmere and Titchwell are among the birds’ last strongholds.
- Bitterns are related to the grey heron.
- They are well-camouflaged and

- difficult to spot, spending much of their time amid the stems where they hunt for small fish and eels.
- Numbers are estimated by the number of males which are heard displaying their booming breeding call each spring.
- There are currently believed to be

- several dozen breeding pairs.
- Habitat loss through climate change and rising sea levels is the biggest threat to the species’ survival.
- But nests are also vulnerable to heavy spring downpours and flooding, both of which have killed eggs and young in recent years.