

CATTLE EGRET: A NEW BIRD FOR NEW ZEALAND

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A bird feeding with the herd on a dairy farm at Belfast, North Canterbury, was seen and suspected of being a Cattle Egret (*Ardeola ibis*) by one of us (F.W.W.) in September, and the identification was confirmed by E.G.T. and D.H.B. on a visit on 28/9/63. Interesting details were given by the farmer, Mr. B. F. Johns, who had thought it was a White Heron (*Egretta alba*). The bird arrived in May, 1963. Mr. Johns had noted that it fed only close to his cows, food always being obtained from the grass close to one of the cows and the bird evidently depending on the disturbance of insects or other invertebrates as the large animal moved about. Alternatively, it would feed in association with the dairy cows on an adjacent farm, but when the two herds were driven in for milking the egret flew off to join non-milking cattle of which there were always some in the vicinity.

On our visit the bird was readily identified — bill yellow with very small dark portion at the tip; legs dark grey (but colour so far has been only unsatisfactorily identified); pure white plumage with no buff coloration visible (probably an immature in view of the lack of buff crown, but may have been a particularly pale individual in winter plumage). Build more stocky and neck thicker and shorter than in Little or White Egret; about one-third smaller than White Egret. In general appearance much like the Reef Heron, but has a characteristic upright stance unlike that of Reef Heron or the egrets; shorter bill than in Little Egret.

Its method of feeding in close association with the herd was as described by Mr. Johns, and as made familiar by descriptions of the species in various parts of its range. No food items were identified.

The trans-Tasman dispersal of this species in view of its current expansion in Australia is not unexpected. It may well have come from the New South Wales (Ulmarra, Clarence River) colony (Hewitt, 1960, 1961; Wheeler, 1962) or have straggled more widely from the larger Northern Territory or W. Australian populations.

REFERENCES

- Hewitt, J. M., 1960: The Cattle Egret in Australia. *Emu* 60: 99-102.
Hewitt, J. M., 1961: The Cattle Egret near Sydney. *Emu* 61: 137-138.
Wheeler, J. R., 1962: Observations on the Cattle Egret in Eastern Australia. *Emu* 62: 192-193.

[In April 1963, Mrs. L. E. Walker, of Dunedin, wrote that she had received a telephone call from Mr. B. E. Kelly, Bay Road, Waitati, about a "young" white heron which had been seen frequently at the fish hatcheries, Waitati Valley; and had lived with the cattle. No details of the colour of bill or legs were given. Mrs. Walker looked for it at Easter, but did not see it, though it had been there two days before.—Ed.]