

## LITTLE EGRET AT MERTON, OTAGO

Having heard reports that a "small" white heron had been seen around the mudflats at Merton, we visited the area on 12/7/59.

It was a clear calm morning and it was not long before we came on two herons feeding close to the road. One was a White-faced Heron (*N. novaehollandiae*) and the other was the bird for which we were looking.

This bird appeared to be, if anything, slightly smaller than the White-faced Heron and had a "leggy" appearance. Its plumage was pure white and dorsal plumes projected about three inches beyond the tail. The breast and the crown of the head seemed, at certain angles, to be covered in down. This we took to be plumes; they were exquisitely filmy. The bill was black and the skin on the face at the base of the bill was yellow. The legs and feet were black but we did not note any yellow on the feet, when the bird flew.

While we remained in the car watching through binoculars, the bird approached to about fifty feet. At intervals, during feedings, it agitated the water with its feet. As it moved farther away, we endeavoured to get a better angle for photography but the bird became alarmed and took off. It had the usual heron flight except that the wing beats were slightly faster than those of the white-faced species.

The bird was much smaller than *Egretta alba* and there seems to be no doubt that it was a Little Egret (*E. garzetta*).

On 2/8/59 when we visited the area again, a White Heron (*E. alba*) was in full view as it fed near a bridge. Shortly after, some Red-billed Gulls were seen to be harassing another bird which proved to be the Little Egret. When it landed, the gulls left it alone. Gradually it made its way towards the larger egret and fed nearby for some time. The filo-plumes on its head and breast appeared much more prominent than they were three weeks before. The bird itself was very wary and the slightest movement made it fly. After a while the gulls began annoying it again and every time a gull flew over, the egret ducked its head. We last saw it flying up the river with some gulls in pursuit.

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## ROYAL SPOONBILLS AT WAITANGI-ROTO CREEK, OKARITO

When visiting this spot on 27/11/58 in performance of official duties for the Department of Internal Affairs, I was pleased to see thirteen Royal Spoonbills (*P. regia*). The birds were evidently nesting, as pieces of straw were protruding from the deep forks of kahikateas. There were four nests in one tree, and possibly one in another, built at varying heights above the ground of approximately 50ft.-70ft. All the nests were much exposed to wind, but enjoyed partial protection because of their position in the trees' forks. For purposes of future reference, the nest sites were downstream two chains from where the White Herons (*E. alba*) nest opposite old kowhai trees. During an hour's visit adults were present, perching on the kahikateas singly and in pairs. According to information later supplied by the Department of Lands and Survey which administers the area, four young were reared.

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