

## SHORT NOTE

### Cattle Egret numbers in New Zealand, 1986 to 1990

In 1984, the number of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) wintering in New Zealand, 1531 birds, was the most yet recorded (Heather 1986). In 1985, the number was much lower and a national count was not organised. In 1986, however, when obviously many more birds than previously were arriving, national counts were begun again, and they have continued until 1990. As in most years since 1977 (Marchant & Higgins 1990), the counts were made in the period late August/early September, when most egrets are well settled on their chosen farms.

Table 1 presents the results of the five counts. In 1986, the number rose sharply to over twice the 1984 total. Since then the numbers, although high by the standards of the 1970s, have fluctuated unpredictably and for reasons unknown.

The relative changes of number from year to year in 1984-1986, as well as the seasonal pattern of arrival and departure, are clearly shown by Figure 1 of Jackson & Olsen (1988). Their numbers for the Horowhenua were typical for New Zealand as a whole, although the pattern was not identical in all regions.

The migratory behaviour of the egrets between Australia and New Zealand has continued unchanged, apart from yearly changes in numbers. They have continued to reach New Zealand mainly in late April and May and leave mainly in late October and November. The known dates of arrival and build-up have been published in the annual Classified Summarised Notes (Howell & Gaze 1986, 1987, Keeley & Gaze 1988, Keeley *et al.* 1989, Taylor *et al.* 1990). Maddock (1990) has summarised in his Figure 5 the records of Cattle Egrets banded or wing-tagged in eastern Australia and recovered in New Zealand.

A few egrets have oversummered in most years, though seldom in the same place twice, but none have stayed to breed.

### REGIONAL DETAILS OF THE COUNTS

#### Far North

1986: Unahi 146 (c.170 in June)

1987: Unahi c.120

1988: Unahi 66

1989: Unahi 52

1990: Unahi 77

#### Northland

1986: Dargaville airstrip 34, Ruawai 350, Oakleigh (Whangarei Harbour) 71

1987: Dargaville airstrip 9, Ruawai 150, Oakleigh 34

1988: Oakleigh 16 (none found at Dargaville or Ruawai all winter)

1989: None found in the usual places

1990: Ruawai 70 + Oakleigh 7

TABLE 1. — Numbers of Cattle Egrets in New Zealand, from counts made in late August and early September, 1986 - 1990

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Far North	147	c.120	66	52	77
Northland	455	c.193	16	0	77+
Auckland	174	155	53	92	42
South Auckland	291	143	64	52	152-162
Waikato	480	485	297	165	314
Bay of Plenty	167	109	74	46	37
Gisborne/Wairoa	31	9	31	4	0
Taranaki	41	16	7	9	49
Hawke's Bay	57	46	21	8	1
Wanganui/Manawatu	392	446+	158	70	79
Wairarapa	52	33	29	0	0
Wellington	1	0	0	1	0
<b>North Island</b>	<b>2288</b>	<b>1755+</b>	<b>816</b>	<b>499</b>	<b>828-838</b>
Nelson	84	95	45	28	37
Mariborough	110	74	50	33	44
West Coast	87	84	20	c.52	125
Canterbury	98	82	61	56	72
Otago	207+	117	12	59	52
Southland	364+	43	127	110+	119
Chatham Island	14	0	11	0	0
<b>South Island</b>	<b>964+</b>	<b>495+</b>	<b>326</b>	<b>338+</b>	<b>449</b>
<b>New Zealand</b>	<b>3252+</b>	<b>2250+</b>	<b>1142</b>	<b>837+</b>	<b>1277-1287</b>

**Auckland**

1986: Parakai 120, Orewa 32, Mangere 22

1987: Parakai 120, Orewa 20, Mangere 14

1988: Parakai 54, Orewa 20, Mangere 1

1989: Parakai 92

1990: Parakai 42 (rose to 54 in October)

**South Auckland**

1986: Aka Aka 291; usual Piako flock not found

1987: Whangamata 2, Aka Aka 56, Piako 85 (96 in September)

1988: Aka Aka 64; Piako flock not found but 47 in June

1989: Aka Aka 52; Piako flock not found but 15 in April

1990: Aka Aka 77-87 (count interrupted as flock flew), Piako 75

**Waikato**

1986: Rangiriri 480; earlier groups of 13 at Rototuna and c.20 at Lake Ngaroto

1987: Rangiriri 474, Rototuna 11, Lake Ngaroto 0 (34 in June)

1989: Rangiriri district, three neighbouring flocks of 74, 21 and 70, totalling 165

1990: Rangiriri 270, Lake Ngaroto 44

**Bay of Plenty**

- 1986: Katikati 15, Kaituna Cut/Maketu 33, Awaiti 86, Opotiki 33  
 1987: Maketu 27, Awaiti 49, Opotiki 33  
 1988: Maketu 17, Awaiti 47, Opotiki 10  
 1989: Maketu 3, Awaiti 39, Opotiki 4 (3 overwintered 1989-90)  
 1990: Kaituna Cut 7, Matata 20, Opotiki 10

**Gisborne/Wairoa**

- 1986: Tolaga Bay district 4, Waimata Valley 8, Gisborne 14, Muriwai 2, Nuhaka 3  
 1987: Tolaga Bay district 2, Gisborne 7  
 1988: Gisborne 22, Nuhaka 9  
 1989: Gisborne 4  
 1990: Nil

**Hawke's Bay**

- 1986: Fernhill 9, Maraekakaho Road 16, Otane 5, Lake Hatuma (Waipukurau) 24  
 1987: Fernhill 2, Otane 0, Lake Hatuma 44  
 1988: Horseshoe Lake 2, Lake Hatuma 19 (none in usual other places)  
 1989: Puketapu 1, Lake Hatuma 7  
 1990: Nil

**Taranaki**

- 1986: Barrett Road (New Plymouth) 30 +  
 1987: Barrett Road 16  
 1988: Barrett Road 0, Parihaka 1, Mokoia 6  
 1989: Barrett Road 9  
 1990: Barrett Road 24, Waitara 25, Kakaramea 27

**Wanganui/Manawatu**

- 1986: Waitotara 11, Whangaehu 32, Woodville 60, Whirokino (Foxton) 240, Lake Horowhenua 60  
 1987: Waitotara 23, Whangaehu 18, Woodville 22, Longburn 13, Whirokino 330 +, Lake Horowhenua 40  
 1988: Whirokino 120, Lake Horowhenua 38 (Waitotara and Whangaehu not counted)  
 1989: Whangaehu 17, Whirokino 26 + (78 in July)  
 1990: Whirokino 79, perhaps the same flock as at Lake Horowhenua, 79 on 16 July but not seen there again

**Wairarapa**

- 1986: Tuhitarata 52  
 1987: Tuhitarata 33  
 1988: Featherston 20, Tuhitarata 9  
 1989: None all winter at usual places  
 1990: None all winter at usual places

**Wellington**

One at Silverstream in 1986 and 1989; otherwise nil

**Nelson**

- 1986: Takaka 43, Motueka 9, Waimea 35, Nelson Haven 4  
1987: Takaka 48, Appleby 47  
1988: Takaka 22, Appleby 23  
1989: Takaka 19, Appleby 9  
1990: Takaka 15, Appleby 22

**Marlborough**

- 1986: Grovetown 110, Kaikoura 0 (not found but 18 on 30 July)  
1987: Grovetown 70, Ward 4, Kaikoura 0 (12 in May)  
1988: Grovetown 46, Kaikoura 4 (7 in July)  
1989: Grovetown 23, Kaikoura 10  
1990: Grovetown 44

**West Coast**

- 1986: Karamea 34, Westport 35, Orowaiti 1, Haupiri 2, Stillwater 1, Rotomanu 3, Inchbonnie 7, Arahura Valley 4  
1987: Karamea 30, Westport 43, Arahura Valley 11  
1988: Karamea 14, Westport 6, all other places nil  
1989: Westport 16, Arahura 6, Kokatahi up to 30, Barrytown 1 (no report from Karamea)  
1990: Karamea 22, Westport 69, lower Buller Gorge 3, Totara Flat 15, Greymouth 2, Arahura 1, Kokatahi 13

**Canterbury**

- 1986: Waikuku 23, Ellesmere 57, Clandeboye 18  
1987: Waikuku 26, Ellesmere 56  
1988: Waikuku 5, Ellesmere 47, Clandeboye 9  
1989: Waikuku 8, Ellesmere 36, Clandeboye 12, Burwood 4 (not confirmed in count period)  
1990: Waikuku 13, Ellesmere 35, Clandeboye 24

**Otago**

- 1986: West Taieri 90, Waikouaiti district 10, Tapanui 1, Stirling 100 + Paraetai 6  
1987: West Taieri 60, Pareta 57  
1988: West Taieri 12 (none in usual other places)  
1989: West Taieri 18, Stirling 39, Inchclutha 2  
1990: West Taieri 26, Stirling 26

**Southland**

- 1986: Waikoikoi 1, Mataura 8, Wyndham 130 +, Mataura Island 25 +, Otautau 13, Tuatapere 1, Drummond 6, Otaitai Bush 41, Woodlands 64, Taramoa 36 +, Otatara 15, Greenhills 8, Gorge Road 3, Scotts Gap 12, Te Anau 1  
1987: Wyndham 43 (no full survey made)  
1988: Wyndham 31, Tisbury 5, Underwood 10, Menzies Ferry 4, Mokotua 10, Waianiwa 1, Edendale 5, Thornbury 60  
1989: Wyndham 50 +, Thornbury 60 +

1990: Wyndham 30, Edendale 21, Gorge Road 8, Woodlands 2, Tisbury 1, Wallacetown 14, Thornbury 43

### Chatham Island

1986: Lake Rangitai 4, Lake Huro 9 (in July, Lake Huro 7, The Bluff, Pitt Island 7)

1987: Nil

1988: Waitangi 2, Wharekauri 8, Owenga 1

1989: Nil

1990: Nil

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is the result of the co-operative effort of many OSNZ members; the following are known to me, but I am sure that many more took part.

L., J. & N. Adams, D.J. & P.J. Agnew, W. Ahlers, D.G. Baker, P. Battley, M.L. Barlow, M.A. Barnes, B.D. Bell, B.A. Binning, K. Bond, D.F. Booth, P.M. Bovill, N. Bradley, G. Brady, A. Brett, B. Brown, K.W.L. Buchanan, B.J. Burch, G. Carlin, S. & C. Carran, J. Carmichael, S. Chambers, R.G. Chappell, R. Child, B. Chudleigh, R.A. & S.F. Creswell, D.E. Crockett, A. Crossland, P. Cuming, M.J. Daly, L.J. Davies, M. Davis, R.W. Dench, J.E. Dowding, J.V. Drieesen, N. Dyson, L. Esler, C. Exley, R. Fenton, G. Foreman, K.C. Gager, P. Garrett, I. Gibson, B.J. Gill, A.J. Goodwin, A. Gordon, G. & D. Grant, D. Hadden, J.G. Hamilton, K.C. Harrison, J.M. Hawkins, J.C. Henley, I. Hogarth, R.N. Holdaway, L. Howell, M. Hows, W.R. Jackson, P. Jenkins, P. Langlands, P.C.M. Latham, C.S. Lauder, R. Lineham, O.J. Linscott, J. & S. Lobb, A. Loman, M. Looney, C. McRae, D.G. Medway, P. Menzies, P.J. Miller, C. Miskelly, J.L. & M. Moore, R. Morgan, S. Morris, P.M. Muller, A. Nevill, S. & F. Nieuwland, B.A. North, M. Olsen, D.J. Onley, F. Overmars, M. Palmer, R. Parrish, S. Petch, R.J. Pierce, A. Plant, G. Quayle, G. Randle, N. Reedy, P. Reese, I. Reid, D. Riddell, H.A. Robertson, F. Ross, N. Rothwell, J. & S. Rowe, P.M. Sagar, C. Schischka, P. Schweigman, K. Scollay, B. & C. Searle, P. & R. Slack, A.V. Slade, W.H. Sloan, B. Soper, K. Stark, H. Stewart, R. Stocker, N. Stuart, R.R. Sutton, M.J. Taylor, P. Thynne, B. & G. Timpson, K.V. Todd, O. Torr, M. Turner, M.P. & P.W. Twydale, U. Walthert, J. Ward, G. Wilkenson, A. Williams, B.A. Woolley, A. Wright, D. York.

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