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## SHORT NOTES

### Cattle Egrets on Stewart Island

The Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) was first recognised in New Zealand in 1963 (Turbott *et al.* 1963). Since then it has been a regular winter visitor to many localities throughout the North and South Islands. There are, however, few published records of the species on Stewart Island.

The first was in 1967 (Falla *et al.* 1970). None was seen on the island during a national census in August 1977 (Heather 1978) but Heather (1982) reported a sighting of nine in Halfmoon Bay on 16 April 1980, with three seen at similar times in the previous two years. A banded first-year bird from Gatton, Queensland, was recovered on the island on 9 June 1983 (Maddock 1990). The *Atlas of Bird Distribution in New Zealand* (Bull *et al.* 1985) shows no records from Stewart Island between 1969 and 1979. There are 29 cards for the 10 000-yard grid square covering Halfmoon Bay and environs (S21001400), but only four were completed in the period April to September when Cattle Egrets are likely to be present. There is only one record in Classified Summarised Notes between 1963 and 1989, of 4 birds at Halfmoon Bay camp-ground on 15 May 1986 (Kerr 1987).

During a trip to Stewart Island in April 1991, I made the following observations. A single bird was seen at the western end of Cooks Arm, southern Stewart Island (47°12' S, 167°36' E) on 13 and 14 April. On 22 April, one bird was seen on Butterfield Beach (c. 800 m north of Halfmoon Bay) and nine were feeding in a group on road verges in the village. When disturbed by pedestrians or traffic they roosted in nearby *Fuchsia excorticata* trees. They were apparently not present when I passed through Halfmoon Bay on 11-12 April, so they probably arrived between 12 and 22 April.

Discussions with local residents confirmed that the species is a regular winter visitor in small numbers. The birds were first widely noticed in Halfmoon Bay in 1974 or 1975; as they could not be readily identified at that time, local schoolchildren undertook a project to determine what they were. Since then, they have been seen in most years (S.D. King, P. Johnston, pers. comm.). There is very little open grassy habitat on Stewart Island and the birds are usually found in the vicinity of Halfmoon Bay, on the school playing field, on Traill Park or on road verges.

The recent edition of the New Zealand Checklist (Turbott 1990) describes the range of the Cattle Egret as "many favoured localities from Northland to Southland;....Regular also on Chatham Island." In spite of

the few written records, it appears that the Cattle Egret should also be considered a regular visitor to Stewart Island. The paucity of sightings is mainly due to the fact that most bird records on the island are made by visitors in summer, when the egrets are absent.

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