

1 km apart: 68 at the Levin sewage ponds and 63 in the Arawhata Road area. These flocks were combined at the sewage ponds on 9 and 17 June, and a record 143 birds was recorded on both occasions.

### Behaviour

When feeding near cows, Cattle Egrets happily wandered right underneath them, but we did not see them standing on the cows' backs as they do in Asia and Africa. Worms seemed to be their main food, apparently brought to the surface, or exposed, by the trampling action of the cows. Flies were also taken from seed stems of ryegrass, especially in warm weather. One bird was seen with a mouse in its bill, which it eventually swallowed. When not feeding with cows, the egrets have been watched moving across a paddock leap-frogging one another, the birds at the back of the flock flying over the front birds for food, much as flocks of Little Black Shags (*Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*) sometimes feed.

At sunset, the Cattle Egrets usually flew off to their roost trees in one flock, settling on the tops as high as they could get. On the other hand, at sunrise they would leave the roost trees in ones and twos, almost an hour passing before the last bird left the roost. They sometimes returned to the roost trees in the daytime, their pure white plumage from a distance making the trees look to be in flower!

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### Predators together

On 11 April 1987, I was photographing harriers (*Circus approximans*) feeding on a dead rabbit that I had placed in front of my hide, on the Ohau river near Twizel. The day was fine, and I was in the hide from 9.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m.

A dark brown juvenile harrier soon arrived but had just started to feed when it was attacked and driven off by an adult harrier. The juvenile circled the adult several times, attacked it, and drove it off. This behaviour was repeated many times, the two at first landing in a heap, clinging with

their talons. Between attacks, the bird on the rabbit would shield it with outstretched wings. When a second adult arrived, they competed while the juvenile watched from the ground.

After about an hour, all three were driven away by a yearling wild tom cat (*Felis catus*), which was not fully grown. While the cat fed, the harriers circled above. About 20 minutes later, the cat ran into the scrub when I released the camera shutter. After 15 minutes, an adult male ferret (*Mustela furo*) appeared and began to feed on the rabbit. The cat reappeared, approached, bared its teeth and hissed, but the ferret took no notice. Both then fed, face to face. Eventually the cat departed, 10 minutes later the ferret departed, and the juvenile harrier returned to feed (the adults having long gone).

These predators should not have been unusually hungry. Rabbit numbers were high enough for the pest destruction board to poison the area 2 months later.

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