

EGRETS IN THE PORT BROUGHTON DISTRICT, S.A.

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Although the Great White Egret *Egretta alba* is fairly widespread in South Australia, it has so far been reported breeding only at Bool Lagoon, Lake Bonney near Millicent, and in Salt Lagoon near Yalkuri (Shane Parker pers. comm.). In this note I report a further breeding locality, Shag Island near Port Broughton. Morgan (1918, *S.A. Orn.* 3:133) recorded seven *E. alba* in mangroves opposite the township of Port Broughton, possibly in October 1917, and C. G. Kerr saw 36 *alba* at Fisherman's Bay on April 24, 1967 (Glover 1968, *S.A. Orn.* 25:30).

I first noticed *alba* breeding in the area when sailing close to the western side of Shag I. at high tide on January 20, 1974, and walked to the island at low tide to examine the colony. There were about 30 large egrets on or near their large flat nests built in mangroves among breeding Little Pied Cormorants *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*, most of which had small young. A thorough or lengthy examination was not made, as the disturbance caused by my presence gave several Australian Ravens *Corvus coronoides* the opportunity to take eggs and small young from nearby nests. However I found several nests with eggs, and several with small to medium-sized young; and there were a few broods of large young on nests or clambering about the trees. Some young egrets flew weakly, and there were a number of empty egrets' nests. An egg which had fallen or been knocked from a nest measures 58 x 38 mm.

Several White-faced Herons *Ardea novae-hollandiae* were seen among the nesting egrets, and a flock of about 30 adult Nankeen Night Herons *Nycticorax calendonicus* was flushed some distance away though I did not ascertain whether they came from nests or were merely roosting. On several occasions (e.g. February 1977, April 1978) while fishing at night in Fisherman's Bay, I have heard or seen Night Herons singly and in groups flying from the direction of Shag I. after dark and returning before sunrise.

On my only subsequent visit to Shag I., a brief one on April 6, 1978, I found no egrets nesting, only Pied Cormorants *Phalacrocorax varius* with large young. However I counted 71 *alba* in shallows west of Shag I. and of these a small group resting on a bar close to the island contained some birds obviously immature, slightly smaller and less tidy looking than several adults with them.

Max Waterman (pers. comm.) and other banders have banded many Pied and Little Cormorants on Shag I. and he has occasionally seen up to 20 or 30 Great White Egrets over the island, but knew of no breeding of egrets there. Waterman is certain (from his observations made during banding trips) that at least between 1963 and 1969 no egrets bred among the cormorants, though I consider that the numbers that he saw on occasions indicate that they might have bred elsewhere on the island or at a different time to the cormorants.

In September 1976, I saw eight *alba* in mangroves at Port Broughton, and on January 23, 1977, about half an hour before sunrise saw about 20 large white egrets leave Shag I. and fly towards Port Broughton. I have seen single egrets in mangroves at Franklin Harbour on July 15, 1975, at Port Wakefield on March 27, 1977, inland from Port Broughton in the Broughton River at Koolunga on April 24, 1974 and February 22, 1975, on a dam near Auburn on March 23 and April 6, 1975, and on a dam in Burra on April 13, 1975. These by their large size were all identifiable as *alba*.

On January 23, 1977, I found a small egret with black bill and legs, and plumes, including two on the back of its head, feeding actively in shallows opposite Shag I. Later sightings of small egrets with black bills and legs in Fisherman's Bay were of eight on February 24, one on March 12, 12 on May 14, about 10 on August 7, 1977, 10 on March 18 and 14 on April 5, 6 and 7, 1978. The birds' small size was evident from comparison with other species near them. For example, at sunrise on April 7, 1978, these birds flew along the channel from Shag I. into Fisherman's Bay with a White-faced Heron which appeared larger than them.

The only South Australian breeding record of the Little Egret *E. garzetta* is from Salt Lagoon near Yalkuri: 1967 (*Bird Talk* 1(1):7). Possibly the species breeds also on Shag I. Parker (pers. comm.) basing his remarks on the incidence of this species in the area, has suggested that it may breed undetected in mangroves in St. Vincent's Gulf. Such colonies could probably be best located by the use of boats at high tide or from the air, rather than on foot.

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