

A SIGHT RECORD OF THE CATTLE EGRET NEAR OODNADATTA

F. J. BADMAN

Accepted 21 January 1981

The Cattle Egret *Ardeola ibis* is known in South Australia only from the southern parts of the state, records from Jamestown, Whyalla and Ceduna marking the northern limits of its known range in this state (Parker *et al.* 1979). This note records a sighting of a single Cattle Egret near Raspberry Creek Bore (28° 07'S, 135° 04'E), ca 75 km south-west of Oodnadatta.

At 07:30 on 18 April 1981, whilst camped on Raspberry Creek about one kilometre south-west of the bore, I noticed a solitary white bird feeding among chenopods and grasses under Gidgea *Acacia cambagei* bordering the creek. My closer approach and observation of the bird through binoculars showed it to be an egret with a shortish yellow bill, blue-grey or greenish (not black) legs, rather thick neck equal to or less than body length and dense feathering under the basal half of the lower mandible. No breeding plumes were present. The bird stood in a very hunched position when not feeding. I watched the bird for about 30 minutes from a distance of 100 m and finally approached to 60 m before it flew away. In flight the egret was chased by several corvids, one of which approached to within one metre. The egret disappeared in the direction of the bore-drain swamp and I was unable to relocate it.

The egret was much too small to have been a Great Egret *Egretta alba* and the bill colour was not black as in the Little Egret *E. garzetta*. The Intermediate Egret *E. intermedia* can also be ruled out because of its slightly larger size, longer bill, more slender neck, leg colour and

P.O. Box 38, Marree, S.A. 5733.

lack of the heavily feathered area under the lower mandible. I have had previous experience of these three egrets in the North-East of South Australia.

A photographic slide was obtained of the bird in flight, from which identification of the bird as a Cattle Egret was confirmed by S. A. Parker of the South Australian Museum where this slide is now lodged.

Although the Cattle Egret is normally a gregarious species it has been recorded alone, inland, at least once previously (Sonter 1980). It has also been recorded at the Alice Springs sewage ponds on several occasions (Roberts 1980, 1981), although its 'accepted' range in the Northern Territory is far to the north of Alice Springs (see Storr 1977).

In June 1981 Mrs Lois Litchfield of Mundowdna Stn., Marree, saw two small egrets perched on the backs of cattle bogged in Lignum Dam, Mundowdna Stn. Although no leg or bill colours were recorded it is possible that her sightings were also of Cattle Egrets.

The provenance of the egret at Raspberry Creek must remain uncertain, but this location is closer to Alice Springs than to Jamestown, Ceduna or Whyalla.

REFERENCES

- Parker, S. A., Eckert, H. J., Ragless, G. B., Cox, J. B. and Reid, N. C. H., 1979. An Annotated Checklist of the Birds of South Australia. Part 1: Emus to Spoonbills. South Australian Ornithological Association.
 Roberts, G. J., 1980. Records of interest from the Alice Springs region. *S. Aust. Orn.* 28: 99-102.
 Roberts, G. J., 1981. Observations of water-birds at the Alice Springs sewage ponds. *S. Aust. Orn.* 28: 175-177.
 Sonter, C., 1980. Cattle Egret at Mildura, Victoria. *Aust. Bird Watcher*, 8: 201-202.
 Storr, G. M., 1977. Birds of the Northern Territory. West. Aust. Museum Spec. Pub. No. 7.