

COLONIAL BREEDING OF THE LITTLE EGRET *ARDEA GARZETTA* AT PRICE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Until now only one instance of the Little Egret *Ardea garzetta* breeding in South Australia has been reported, that of a solitary nest containing one egg in Salt Lagoon, Lake Alexandrina on 19 November 1967 (Bonnin & Rix 1972). This article and Vincent & Paton (1986, this issue) record two more occurrences of breeding in South Australia.

A small colony was found in a mangrove lined, tidal channel (Wills Ck) at Price, Gulf St Vincent. The site was visited by KT and LU on 16 January 1983, by JR on 19 February 1983, and by L. Joseph, S.A. Parker and JR on 7 March 1983.

On the first visit a single nest containing two, pale blue eggs was found above the channel in an overhanging mangrove. Three adult Little Egrets were observed in the vicinity. Plumes were noticed on the back of the head of the bird flushed from the nest. There was a clean, empty nest *ca* 3 m away.

On the second visit two nests were located, each containing two downy chicks. The chicks called persistently giving harsh hissing or rasping notes reminiscent of the adult Apostlebird *Struthidea cinerea*. Occupant(s) of a third nest, although not located, could be heard nearby. There were as many as eight adults in the vicinity, although the chicks were not fed while the observer was present. Several empty nests were found and one was collected (SAM, B37062). Its maximum width was *ca* 40 cm and its shallow cup, *ca* 15 cm in diameter, was full of carapaces of the locally abundant mangrove inhabiting crab *Heliograpsus haswelli*.

On the final visit another nest was located containing two nestlings thought to be less than a week old. The down was white, the bill orange-yellow with a black tip, the orbital ring greenish, the eye dark and legs green-yellow. Nearby two flightless individuals, which had vacated their nest, were observed. They were approximately three quarters grown and had dark bills and legs. On this occasion *ca* 10 adults were present.

This series of observations indicates that this group of Little Egrets was breeding in a loose colony along at least 80 m of the channel. Van Tets (1976) stated that Little Egrets are colonial nesters which may breed throughout the year depending on the availability of food.

Subsequent to these observations, the overhanging limbs of mangroves along Wills Ck have been sawn off, presumably to allow the safer navigation of small fishing craft along the channel. Perhaps owing to this disturbance of the breeding site, no nesting has been observed during visits by the authors in the two succeeding summers.

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