

## ID GUIDE FOR NESTLING EGRETS (1 of 3)

This ID guide repeats the information published in *Corella* Vol 13 in 1989 for the original *Bird in the Hand* series to make it readily available to users of *Bird in the Hand (Second Edition)*.

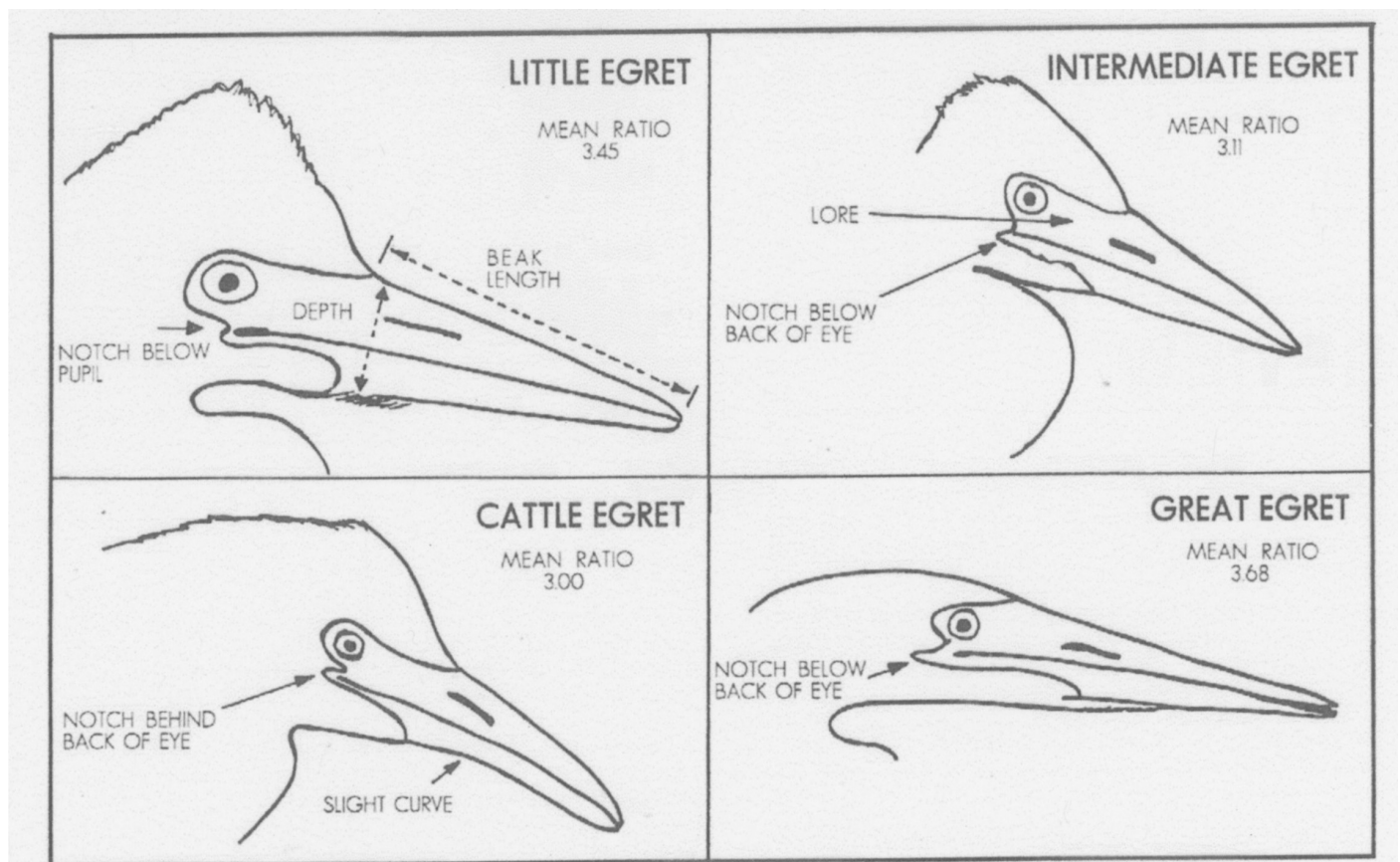
“The four common white egret species in Australia, the Great Egret *Egretta alba*, Intermediate Egret *E. intermedia*, Little Egret *E. garzetta* and Cattle Egret *Ardeola ibis*, frequently nest in multi-species colonies and accurate identification is particularly important when comprehensive marking operations of nestlings are undertaken.

Advanced young leave the nest when disturbed by the bander and scramble to outer or higher branches. This presents the problem of separating the members of the different species of white birds of similar size and superficially similar characteristics which have come from nests in the same tree or group of trees.

The following diagnostic features are taken from Maddock (1988), which should be consulted for more detailed discussion. Several of the characters exhibit some variability, and these are given in Table 1 in decreasing order of occurrence. Each egret shares some with at least one other species. For these reasons, most characters should be used in combination. The key one is the extent of the notch of coloured flesh at the gape of the beak (gape notch) (Fig 1). The bill length/depth ratio is calculated as bill length (tip to base of culmen) divided by the bill depth at the rear of the nares. (Fig 1). Size can be used to separate Great Egrets from other species after a certain age (bill length > 65 mm; wing chord > 250 mm; Tarsus > 90 mm).

Each species has a characteristic ‘jizz’ or overall appearance of the facial features, which the bander learns to recognise with practice. These are illustrated in Plate1.” (Maddock (1989).

Figure 1: Beak profiles of nestling egrets (relative sizes not to scale). From Maddock (1988)



References: Maddock, M. (1988). Field identification characteristics of nestling egrets. Proceedings of International Symposium on Wetlands (1986). Shortlands Wetlands Centre and University of Newcastle Board of Environmental Studies.

Maddock, M. (1989) - *Corella* 13 (1) *Bird in the Hand* – Identification of Nestling Egrets (*Egretta* sp. and *Ardea ibis*)

Compiled by J.W. Hardy for the Australian Bird Study Association Inc.

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Table 1: Summary of diagnostic characters of nesting egrets

	LITTLE	GREAT	INTERMEDIATE	CATTLE
<b>Gape Notch</b> (Fig. 1)	Below pupil; almost non-existent	Distinct; behind back of eye	Distinct; behind back of eye	Distinct; behind back of eye
<b>Back</b> (Fig. 1)	Long, slender	Long, robust; slender in proportion to length	Robust; straight profile	Robust with slight downward curve
<b>Mean length/depth ratio</b>	3.45	3.68	3.11	3.00
<b>Forehead</b>	Distinct	Flat	Distinct	Distinct
<b>Crown of head</b>	White	White	White	White when young; buff when approaching fledging
<b>Beak</b>	Yellow; black-tipped yellow; variegated black-yellow; gape line sometimes black	Black-tipped yellow; black gape line	Yellow; black-tipped yellow; variegated black; gape line sometimes black	Black; yellow-tipped black; yellow-tipped grey; diffused grey or black-yellow as nearing fledging
<b>Tongue</b>	Pink; yellow	Black; grey; pink or yellow with black approaching fledging	Black or grey; pink or yellow with black approaching fledging	Pink; some grey or black and pink; black (rare)
<b>Hard palate</b>	Predominately yellow; may be black or have black marks	Black; yellow or pink with black approaching fledging	Black; yellow or pink with black approaching fledging	Black or grey; pink or yellow with black approaching fledging
<b>Lores</b>	Yellow; variegated black-yellow; black	Greenish yellow	Yellow; yellow and black	Same colour as beak
<b>Iris</b>	White; cream; yellow	Cream; yellow	White; cream; yellow	White; cream; yellow
<b>Skin</b>	Greyish green; green	Greyish green	Yellowish green	Greyish green
<b>Soles</b>	Yellowish or yellow	Pale grey	Pale grey	Grey

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Maddock, M. (1989) - *Corella* 13 (1) Bird in the Hand – Identification of Nestling Egrets (*Egretta* sp. and *Ardea ibis*)

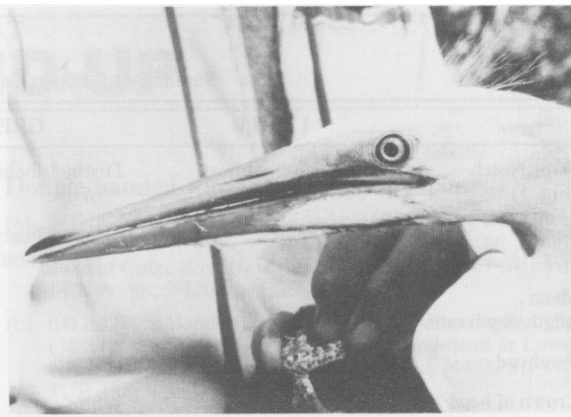
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*Plate 1 Nestling egrets illustrating 'jizz' of face of each species*



CATTLE EGRET



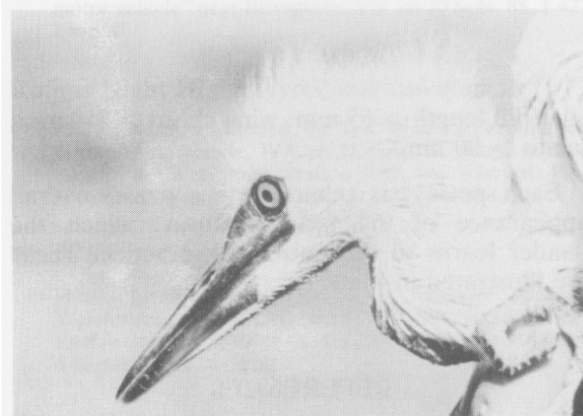
GREAT EGRET



BLACK-BILLED INTERMEDIATE EGRET



YELLOW-BILLED INTERMEDIATE EGRET



BLACK-BILLED LITTLE EGRET



YELLOW-BILLED LITTLE EGRET

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