

OBSERVATIONS ON THE BIOLOGY OF THE WHITE-FACED HERON *Ardea novaehollandiae*

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The White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae* is not an uncommon species in the Hunter Valley, NSW, occurring individually or in small groups (two to five), with larger flocks in wet pasture after rain or flood. Its morphology is described and compared with those of egrets, and variations in the grey plumage pattern reported. Nests observed have been solitary, even when in same area as an egret colony, and very high in trees. Breeding behaviour for four pairs observed is described. Courting behaviour was conducted in general area of nest-site location. Pursuit flights, and typical heron-type 'back-bite', 'twig-shake' and 'wing-preen' (Hancock and Kushlan 1984) have been observed. Incubation time is estimated as 24–26 days. Young were observed to be left unattended at nine days, to clamber at 20 days and to fledge at 43. Breeding success at five nests for which outcomes were determined was 1.40 per nesting attempt. Both parents undertook incubation and care of young. Five cases of breeding commencement in spring (October, November), one summer (December), and one winter (July) were recorded. Incidents of agonistic interaction with a Noisy Miner, a Laughing Kookaburra and another White-faced Heron are reported.