

THE EFFECT OF DROUGHT-BREAKING RAIN ON THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF EGRET COLONIES IN NORTH COASTAL NEW SOUTH WALES

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Received 20 June 1992

The re-establishment of five breeding colonies of egrets on the north coast of New South Wales was monitored over a period during which drought-breaking rain fell. Colonisation was affected by the water level of the colony site prior to this rainfall event. Dry sites were not colonised until flooding of the site occurred whilst those with water were only colonised by Cattle Egrets. Great, Intermediate and Little Egrets commenced nesting in significant numbers only after this rainfall event. Where nesting of all four species commenced at the same time, Cattle Egrets were able to respond more quickly and were more synchronised. Availability of water seemed to be the major limiting factor for Cattle Egrets but the case is less certain for the other egret species.