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COMMUNAL ROOSTING OF EASTERN REEF EGRETS *Egretta sacra*

The Eastern Reef Egret *Egretta sacra* is a maritime species which occurs throughout the Australasia region (Hancock and Kushlan 1984). It nests in loose colonies, and individuals may aggregate along the shore prior to moving on to feeding areas (Hancock and Kushlan 1984; Recher and Recher 1972). Foraging aggregations also occur where prey is concentrated (Recher and Recher 1972; Ewins and Bazely, pers. obs.). Roosting has been variously reported as solitary, loosely gregarious (Macdonald 1973; Pizzey 1980) or communal (Belcher and Sibson 1972; Watling 1982). Eastern Reef Egrets nesting on islands of the Capricorn Group at the southern end of the Great Barrier Reef returned from foraging directly to their nests. Birds roosted on or near their nests (Recher, pers. obs.). There are few published accounts of roosting behaviour outside the breeding season.

On 20 January 1980 two of us (PJE & DRB) observed a communal roost of non-breeding Eastern Reef Egrets on Ko Waw (Vao Island). Ko Waw lies on the archipelago *c.* 8 km east of the island of Phucket, Thailand (*c.* 7°45′N., 98°25′E.). At 1730 hrs *c.* 200 egrets (all dark morphs) had gathered in trees and scrub at the northern end of this small (*c.* 10 ha) uninhabitated island. Occasionally the flock wheeled around above the canopy, but quickly resettled. At dusk the tide was half ascended so that the birds had had a long period of low water during the afternoon in which to feed. Elsewhere in the area Eastern Reef Egrets were noted feeding singly along rocky coasts and in small groups (up to four birds) on exposed reefs, at an average density of two birds per kilometre of coastline. All the birds observed were dark morphs.

Birds from the Ko Waw roost dispersed to feed around the neighbouring island and reefs. Nearby islands offered similar conditions, but egrets did not roost on these. We suspect that the Ko Waw roost was in response to the presence of White-bellied Sea-Eagles *Haliaeetus leucogaster* throughout the archipelago. Sea-eagles are known to prey on Eastern Reef Egrets (Smith 1985), and communal roosting may be a predator avoidance mechanism.

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P. J. EWINS
D. R. BAZELY

Edward Grey Institute of Field Ornithology,
Department of Zoology,
South Parks Road, Oxford OX1 3PS, United Kingdom.

H. F. RECHER

Department of Ecosystem Management,
University of New England,
Armidale, NSW 2351

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