

Feeding Behaviour and Diet of the White-faced Heron *Ardea novaehollandiae* in Westernport Bay, Victoria

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White-faced Herons *Ardea novaehollandiae* were studied in Westernport Bay between 1977 and 1982. Herons were present throughout the year but most moved away from the coast during the breeding season. Some herons returned to the same areas of mudflat from year to year. Herons fed in a wide variety of habitats: intertidal mudflats, saltmarsh, freshwater marsh, cultivated pastures and drainage depressions, residential lawns and intertidal rocky shores on the oceanic coastline. Herons fed in both intertidal and terrestrial habitats throughout the year but took most of their food from the intertidal habitat in summer and autumn and from the terrestrial habitat in winter and spring. On mudflats, herons usually foraged alone and occasionally defended territories. They consumed a large range of prey species and prey sizes on the mudflats. Two species of caridean prawn and one species of crab dominated the stomach contents of eight herons that had fed on mudflats. The stomach contents of six herons that had fed in terrestrial habitats also contained a large range of prey species. The White-faced Heron used feeding methods that were energetically inexpensive and appeared to have low capture rates. The feeding strategy of the White-faced Heron may be described as a "habitat generalist".