

Observations of breeding, feeding and seasonal migration of Cattle Egret in south-west Western Australia

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Abstract. Field studies show that the Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* in the south-west of Western Australia follows a similar seasonal migration pattern as those in the eastern states. The core feeding grounds outside the breeding season are pastures found around Alcoa Wellard Wetlands, Harvey, Bunbury, Denmark and Albany. Observations indicate that most of the population in the study area is absent from its rural feeding ranges during the breeding season (November-December). Cattle Egrets move seasonally to the only known breeding colony in south-western Western Australia at Mandurah and migrate up to 340 km to reach the colony. In 2022 and 2024 the number of active nests exceeded 60 pairs. Egrets forage on grasslands within a 20 km radius of the breeding colony and disperse southwards after the breeding season. The Cattle Egret population has increased in the past decade with sightings of flocks of up to 40-80 birds not unusual. The declining rainfall pattern in the south-west of Western Australia has the potential to impact on the food sources and distribution of the Cattle Egret.

Keywords: Cattle Egret; seasonal migration; distribution; climate change; colony composition