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SHORT NOTE

Cattle Egrets in Fiordland National Park 1973 - 1987

Various observers have seen Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis coromandus*) in Fiordland National Park, some near landfalls. These Cattle Egret records supplement those published by Heather (1978, 1982, 1986). I am very grateful to the following for their information: I. G. Adam, K. F. Bradley, N. M. Drysdale, W. Ellis, M. A. Gunn, R. D. Kerr, J. Landreth, J. S. Ombler, B. W. Paddon, R. J. Peacock, A. J. Pearce, B. Roderick, G. A. T. Taylor, B. W. Thomas, I. D. Thorne, J. G. Trotter, K. Wells, A. Wright.

1973: Preservation Inlet, Puysegur Point lighthouse farm, P. Daniels, lighthouse keeper, saw 1 feeding near cows during the last week of April and the first week of May (Wright, A., 1973. Preservation Inlet: July 1973. Unpubl. report. NZ Wildlife Service; Heather 1982 : 254).

1974 - 1976: No records.

1977: Lower Hollyford Valley, Hollyford Camp, 2 feeding with horses in May (WE, MAG).

1978: No records.

1979: Lower Hollyford Valley, Hollyford Camp, 13 stayed a few days in May (MAG).

1980: Preservation Inlet, Puysegur Point lighthouse farm, 1 sheltered under a cow when attacked by a New Zealand Falcon (*Falco novaeseelandiae*) on 16/4 (RJP; Heather 1982 : 254). Lake Te Anau, near Te Anau Wildlife Centre, seen in lake shallows adjacent to shore roost : 3 on 28/4, 3 on 29/4, 13 on 1/5, 7 on 6/5, 2 on 8/5, 7 on 9/5, 7 on 11/5, 7 on 15/5, 1 on 19/5, 1 on 24/5 (pers. obs.).

1981 - 1982: No records.

1983: Eglinton Valley, Lake Lochie, 1 near shore on 5/5 (JGT).

1984: Milford Sound, 16 first seen on tidal flats on 6/4, on 11 - 20/4 feeding at end of airstrip by day and roosting overnight in beech tree behind Milford Hotel (RDK: Heather 1986 : 187). Chalky Inlet, Reef Point, 2 "egrets" perching in shore manuka one day during 16 - 28/4. The day after the sighting remains of a predated bird (bill and feathers) were found at the same spot (JL). The bill was identified as Cattle Egret at National Museum (N. Hyde, pers. comm.). Doubtful Sound, Deep Cove, flock of 9 flying 30 m above the sea towards head of cove on 5/5, not seen again (KFB, JSO). Hollyford Valley, Martins Bay, 1 feeding on riverbank and grass by his house for 10 days in early August (NMD).

1985: Clinton Valley, Glade House, 3 perching in beech trees and fluttering about clearing on 9/5 (IGA).

1986: Doubtful Sound, Deep Cove, 1 near Deep Cove Hostel on 20 - 23/3 (IDT); Deep Cove tailrace embankment, B. W. Paddon, a Fiordland Travel bus driver, saw a New Zealand Falcon dragging a Cattle Egret on the road on 7/4. The falcon hopped on one foot while its other foot held the egret by the neck. The Cattle Egret was "rescued" and taken to Te Anau Wildlife Centre where its only injury was a bunch of feathers missing from the nape (BWP). Deep Cove, 5 seen about 0900 hours on 16/4 (IDT). George Sound, Whitewater River estuary, 1 on 6/4 which backed up under a log to avoid a New Zealand Falcon attack on 7/4 (BR, KW). Milford Sound, 7 on mudflats with a White Heron (*Egretta alba*) on 6/4 (RDK); 3 feeding near a White Heron on 19/4 (pers. obs.); 1 on 2/5 (JGT). Upper Hollyford Valley, near Monkey Creek, A. J. Pearce and M. W. D. staff saw a large New Zealand Falcon (obviously a female) standing beside a Cattle Egret it had killed on 8/4. The falcon, which appeared gorged after eating all of the egret's neck, was not able to fly away (AJP). Breaksea Sound, second outermost Gilbert Island, 1 on north-east shoreline rocks at 1510 hours on 11/4 (first Fiordland island record) (GAT, BWT). Lower Hollyford Valley, Hidden Falls, 1 on flat on 20/4 (RDK); Hollyford Camp, 6 on grassy flat behind camp on 26/4 (RDK).

1987: Hollyford Valley, Martins Bay, 13 on 10/4 (NMD). Milford Sound, 1 near airstrip on 22 - 29/4 (RJP, AJP).

Discussion: Combining the likely highest Cattle Egret numbers for each locality annual totals are 1973 (1), 1977 (2), 1979 (13), 1980 (14), 1983 (1), 1984 (28), 1985 (3), 1986 (24), 1987 (14). Localities with the highest Cattle Egret numbers in 1973 - 87 are Hollyford Valley 37, Milford Sound 24, Deep Cove 16.

Cattle Egrets have arrived in ones, twos, or small groups between 20 March and 5 May throughout the 257 km span of coast between Long Reef and Puysegur Point. Some birds have probably dispersed 98 km south from Martins Bay to the nearest pasture with enclosed stock at Te Anau Downs Station where Cattle Egret numbers in 1986 were 2 on 19/4, 22 on 3/5, 8 on 17/5 (pers. obs.).

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