

SHORT NOTE

SIGHT RECORD OF *Egretta intermedia* IN NEW ZEALAND

On Saturday, 1 September 1979, we saw a solitary white heron near Huntly West Road, between Lake Whangape and the Waikato River. We were able to study the bird for about 10 minutes in the morning and for about 20 minutes in the afternoon on our return. The day was windy and at times overcast and showery, but we had good views from about 70 metres with x 7 binoculars and with a x 20 telescope.

This bird was a little larger than a Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) but much smaller than a White Heron (*Egretta alba*). Fortunately, a flock of 118 Cattle Egret was only a few hundred yards away, flying and feeding as a close-knit group, and so we had an opportunity to compare them. We also spent some time studying a White Heron at nearby Lake Hakanoa within the hour. We could see how much bigger the White Heron was, with its much longer neck and its distinctive feeding as it tip-toed delicately across the floating weed in the shallows of the lake.

Our solitary bird was a more active feeder than the Cattle Egret, continuously probing among the maize stubble and gulping down small objects which we could not identify. It did not associate with stock nor with the large flock of Cattle Egret, which were often in sight of it, on pasture with sheep or cattle.

The yellow bill was heavy at the base, sharply pointed and looked longer than the head. Orange-yellow was across the base of the bill and around the eye like very small spectacles, with white feathers extending forward below the eye and round the gape. The iris was yellow. All the plumage was pure white. The neck was longer and more sinuous than that of a Cattle Egret. The legs — lower tibia, tarsi and feet — were all-black. Our bird lacked the hunched-up attitude of a Cattle Egret. With its longer bill and longer neck and the absence of a jowl, it looked more elegant. There were no plumes, although some mantle and neck feathers fluffed out in the wind.

We identified the bird to be an Intermediate (Plumed) Egret (*Egretta intermedia*), and we believe that the dark tibias and absence of plumes may indicate that this was an immature bird.

The first, and only other, record of this species in New Zealand is a mounted specimen in the National Museum. It came to hand as a result of a prosecution relating to the possession of totally protected wildlife. The specimen, an adult in full plumage, was picked up on Foxton Beach by L. O. Burmeister, Palmerston North, during October in either 1972 or 1973.

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