

# Cattle Egret

## Cattle Egret

La garcilla bueyera

*Ardeola ibis*

Class: Aves

Order: Ciconiiformes

Family: Ardeidae

Genus: Ardeola



### Distribution

This is a very cosmopolitan bird. It is found on each continent, with the exception of Antarctica.

### Habitat

It is found in the tropics, subtropics, and warm temperate zones. Flocks occupy a variety of habitats.

### Food

Although primarily insectivorous they consume a variety of other small animals.

### Reproduction

Nesting season varies regionally and relates to food availability. In the temperate northern zones, nesting occurs in spring and summer. In the tropics it occurs at the end of the rainy season. Nests are not necessarily near water. They are made of reeds, twigs, or branches fashioned into a platform about 40 cm wide.

Originally native to parts of Asia, Africa and Europe, it has undergone a rapid expansion in its distribution. It has been introduced to several areas to assist in the control of insects around domestic cattle herds which are now raised around the world. Some flocks are migratory, some sedentary, and others disperse after breeding.

Flocks occupy open grassy areas, meadows, fresh water swamps, rice fields, and pastures often alongside hooved livestock. It is the least aquatic of herons occurring regularly in dry, arid semi-arid areas where it may remain for long periods away from water. It also appears in suburban zones; golf courses or even towns.

Insects consumed include locusts, grasshoppers, caterpillars, beetles dragonflies, cicadas, ticks, moths and flies ((adults and maggots) They also feed on frogs, tadpoles, earthworms, molluscs, fish, crustaceans, lizards, small birds and rodents. They have been observed scavenging at urban dumps.

They are colonial breeders with a new mate being chosen each season. Males develop breeding colours and establish territories. The male displays in a tree situated within the colony, using a range of ritualized behaviors, including shaking a twig and sky-pointing (raising bill vertically upwards). This may last over three to four days. Individuals enter the breeding population at two to three years of age. Once pairs have been established females construct nests utilizing material provided mainly by the males. Nest building and breeding is usually completed in three days, after which the birds begin to lose their breeding colours. The clutch size can be anywhere from one to five eggs, although three or four is most common. The pale bluish-white eggs are oval-shaped and measure 45 mm × 53 mm.

### Development

One egg with a length of 4-5 cm is laid every other day during nesting, and the eggs hatch sequentially around 24 days after they are laid. Fledglings begin to fly 25-30 days after hatching, and they become independent around 45 days post-hatch.

### Characteristics

It is a stocky heron with a short, thick neck, a sturdy bill, and a hunched posture. The sexes are similar.

### Adaptations

Cattle egrets can be sedentary, partial or totally migratory depending on environmental conditions. They are amongst the most social herons forming small or large flocks on their feeding grounds.

### Status/Threats

These are under no particular threat. As with many species loss of suitable breeding habitats is a threat.

### Sightings at Cano Palma

This ubiquitous bird is seen frequently in surrounding areas.

#### References:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111>  
[http://www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view\\_file&file\\_id=WR9860575.pdf](http://www.publish.csiro.au/?act=view_file&file_id=WR9860575.pdf)  
<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=3730>

Both sexes share incubation duties. The chicks are partly covered with white down at hatching. They are cared for by both parents. At about 10 days they leave the nest but stay on nearby branches climbing around for another two weeks. They are capable of regulating their temperature and fledge at 30 days. They are fully independent after another 15 days. Studies have shown that there is intense sibling rivalry over food and more aggressive chicks tend to prevail. Young egrets may disperse over long distances.

The male is marginally larger and has slightly longer breeding plumes. During courtship a buff wash appears over much of its body and the legs turn reddish. Juveniles lack coloured plumes and have a black bill. The non-breeding adult has mainly white plumage, a yellow bill and greyish yellow legs. Size: 46 – 56 cm. Weight: 270 – 512 g. Wing span 88 – 96 cm.

The common name of the cattle egret comes from their familiar habit of foraging in pasturelands in association with livestock animals whose movements and grazing activities flush out insect and other potential prey items. They also perch on the backs of animals and feed by removing ticks. Cattle egrets will also follow tractors in order to feed on the organisms that are scared up. In Africa they attend forest fires or savannah fires capturing fleeing insects. They are active, gregarious feeders assembled in loose flocks of a dozen or more birds, but may gather in hundreds or even thousands when food is abundant. They are opportunistic and non-competitive feeders.

In some areas of the world the Cattle Egret is considered a pest. Research has been conducted into methods for removing the birds from unwanted locations. These include shooting, trapping, and netting. Only in Japan are numbers declining.

They are seen particularly on the North Beach Trail between the research station and Turtle Beach Lodge, also at the river mouth.



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