

<b>Common Name:</b> Cattle egret	<b>Scientific Name:</b> <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>
<b>Class:</b> Aves <b>Order:</b> Ciconiiformes <b>Family:</b> Ardeidae	<b>Feeding Type:</b> Carnivore <b>Statistics:</b> Weight: 1 lb Wingspan: 3 ft

**DESCRIPTION:** The cattle egret is a very elegant bird. Its coloring is a crisp white with an amber colored patch on each wing. The beak and feet are an orange color. It is very distinct when compared to other egrets and herons because it is much smaller and its bill and legs are lighter in color. Herons and other egrets spend majority of time in the water, while cattle egrets rarely spend time in the water.

**RANGE:** Worldwide. The cattle egret is an Old World native, common from Africa east to India, north to northern China and South to Australia. It was first reported in the New World in 1877 in British Guiana. From there it expanded its range, island-hopping to Florida by 1942. Since then, the egret population has been exploding throughout the southeastern United States, probably due to a lack of natural enemies and relatively little competition from native animals of the New World.

**HABITAT:** Deserts, grasslands, farmland, and forest

**ADAPTATIONS:** Cattle egrets are clever birds in the way that it depends on other animals as a means of getting food. It gets its name from following large herds of cattle, who disturb insects as the group moves, creating a feast for egrets that may be perched on a cow's back to get a better view.

**REPRODUCTION/GROWTH:** During the breeding season, male cattle egrets can become very aggressive. This attracts groups of females, only one of which is allowed to remain. After a male chooses his breeding site, he struts around, hunching his neck and spreading his wings from side to side. Both parents take care of the eggs. Up to 100 pair of cattle egrets may nest in one tree during the mating season, as many as 10,000 may been seen in a single roosting site.

**LONGEVITY:** Approximately 10 to 13 years

**PREY/PREDATOR:** Prey to larger carnivores  
Predator to insects, lizards, frogs, etc.

**DIET:** WILD - Insects, frogs, lizards, and birds  
SZ - Fish and bird of prey meat

An analysis of stomach contents of egrets collected and dissected at a rate of five birds per week from August 15 to October 16 revealed their diets. On average, by numbers of specimens recovered, egrets consumed 59% horse flies, 28% grasshoppers and crickets, 5% tree frogs, 4% spiders, 2% dragon flies, 0.8% stable flies, 0.1% ticks and 0.1% undetermined organisms. The average number of horse flies per egret stomach was 51.5! Certainly the egrets diet will be influenced by the abundance of insect species present in areas where the birds are feeding.

**STATUS:** In safe numbers, the cattle egret is probably the most wide-spread egret in the world. Originally migrating from Africa to other parts of the world, cattle egrets are common in terrestrial and wetland habitats. It is found perched on grazing animals, migrating in flocks, paired during mating seasons, and seldom alone.

The egrets follow cattle daily from sunrise until late afternoon. The number of cattle egrets observed with each animal varies, but commonly averages two per animal. Egrets walk very near the cattle, picking insects from the animals and surrounding vegetation. It pecks horse flies and other nuisance flies from the cattle's lower extremities and regularly perched upon the animals' backs to feed. Cattle do not appear belligerent or disturbed by the presence of egrets. In fact, cattle apparently encourage the egrets' association by moderating tail-switching and other "fly fighting" behavior while egrets feed on backs.

Egrets have adapted to many diverse terrestrial habitats, and are expected to expand its range throughout the world.

**SPECIAL NOTES:** Wild cattle egrets can sometimes be seen sitting on top of our aviary, visiting the egrets located in the Australian outback.

Cattle egrets are considered to be both a beneficial insect predator as well as a nuisance to people and property.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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