

## Article on Egrets for eSkimmer News

The short, thick-necked Cattle Egret spends most of its time in fields rather than streams. It forages at the feet of grazing cattle, head bobbing with each step, or rides on their backs to pick at ticks. This stocky white heron has yellow plumes on its head and neck during breeding season.

Cattle Egrets native range was Africa just above the equator, East Africa, the Indian sub-continent, and Southeast Asia. Young egrets scatter to the four winds after the breeding season (one banded bird traveled 2600 miles from its natal rookery) helping it expand its range. Surinam (northern South America) in 1877 but only really established in 1940's. Panama in 1947, Florida in 1953 and Midwest by 1955 and now cover most of US and Canada. They became one of the most abundant of the North American herons, showing up as far north as Alaska and Newfoundland.

### Cool Facts:

- Cattle Egrets follow large animals or machines and eat invertebrates stirred up from the ground. They will fly toward smoke from long distances away, to catch insects fleeing a fire.
- The Cattle Egret has a broad and flexible diet that occasionally includes other birds. In the Dry Tortugas off the coast of Florida, migrating Cattle Egrets have been seen hunting migrating warblers.
- Cattle Egrets have many names around the world, usually referencing the grazing animals they team up with to forage. In various languages they are known as cow cranes, cow herons, cow birds, elephant birds, rhinoceros egrets, and hippopotamus egrets.
- The oldest Cattle Egret on record was at least 17 years old when it was captured and released in Pennsylvania in 1979. It had been banded in Maryland in 1962.
- Cattle Egrets nest in dense colonies of stick nests in trees or emergent wetlands, often mixed with other species of herons.

### Habitats:

They forage in flocks in upland areas such as pastures and fields, generally focusing on drier habitats than other species of white herons. Cattle Egrets breed in coastal barrier islands, marshes, reservoirs, lakes, quarries, swamps, riverside woodlands, and upland forests. They usually nest in colonies already established by native herons and egrets, and forage in fields with grazing livestock. During spring and fall migration they stop along marine shorelines as well as in farm fields. Some spend winters in the southern United States, mainly in coastal areas where the temperature rarely falls below 40° Fahrenheit. Scattered individuals spend mild winters farther north on both coasts, as far as Washington and Rhode Island. Their North American range is still expanding.

