



## Yellowbilled Egret

### Geelbekwitreier

#### *Egretta intermedia*

The Yellowbilled (Intermediate) Egret is found in sub-Saharan Africa, in southeastern Asia from India to Japan, and in Australasia (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992). The subspecies occurring in Africa is *E. i. brachyrhyncha* (Brown *et al.* 1982). In southern Africa it is uncommon to locally common, showing local, or possibly partially migratory movements (Brown *et al.* 1982; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b).

Highest reporting rates were from the Okavango basin, the southwestern Cape Province, the highveld areas of the southern Transvaal and Free State, and northern coastal KwaZulu-Natal. The distribution is more scattered in Zimbabwe, northern Transvaal and KwaZulu-Natal interior. The population in the southwestern Cape Province appears to be fairly isolated, because the species is scarce or absent in much of the remainder of the Cape Province, Namibia and Botswana. Isolated records suggest that nomads can visit suitable waterbodies anywhere.

It feeds alone, in small groups, or with other wading birds. It is regularly confused with the Great White Heron *Casmerodius albus*, and it is possible that some records refer to that species.

**Habitat:** It requires suitable bodies of shallow water or wet grasslands, and tends to avoid mountainous regions, forests and deserts. It favours the margins of lakes, rivers, saltpans and estuaries, especially seasonal waterbodies, marshes and flooded grasslands with short, emergent vegetation, but sometimes feeds in dry grasslands close to water. It roosts and breeds, usually in mixed-species colonies, in reedbeds or trees over water (Tarboton *et al.* 1987b; Ginn *et al.* 1989; Maclean 1993b).

**Movements:** It may be resident on permanent wetlands, but it undertakes movements in response to rainfall events, taking advantage of seasonal wetlands, hence numbers at localities may vary greatly from year to year. The models suggest an influx of summer visitors to southern Africa, especially in the northern and eastern Zones, but there is little support for this from counts made in Zimbabwe (Tree 1989e). The possibil-

ity that part of the population may migrate from further north in Africa needs investigation. The only documented long-distance movement is of a juvenile ringed at Rondevlei (3418AB) in November 1956 and recovered 2120 km to the north at Mongu (15°S 23°E), Zambia, seven months later (Elliott & Jarvis 1973; SAFRING). Other recoveries of nestlings ringed at Rondevlei were within the southwestern Cape Province, the farthest being at Bredasdorp (3420CA). The extent of the geographical isolation of the population in the southwestern Cape Province is surprising; the single recovery in Zambia points to this population not being genetically isolated, but further studies are needed to understand this species' movements.

**Breeding:** Breeding may be localized and infrequent. Most records were from Zones 4 and 7 during the atlas period, which was generally dry, although the species is known to breed also in the northern Zones. Breeding was primarily during summer rains in Zone 7, and in spring in Zone 4, but published egg-laying data indicate substantial breeding in late winter (July–September) in Zimbabwe and the Transvaal (Irwin 1981; Tarboton *et al.* 1987b).

**Interspecific relationships:** Often solitary or found in small groups, it may join other herons and egrets at abundant food sources. Wading depth is determined by leg length, which is intermediate between Little Egret *E. garzetta* and Great White Heron (Maclean 1993b), so minimizing competition. Although it has no very close relatives (Snow 1978), it has much in common with other egrets and herons.

**Historical distribution and conservation:** The extent to which this species was affected by the plume trade at the beginning of the 20th century is not known. It has increased in range and abundance in West Africa (Brown *et al.* 1982) and an increase in artificial waterbodies has probably benefited it (Irwin 1981). Its preference for floodplains and marshes makes it vulnerable to wetland drainage. Based on factors causing declines in numbers elsewhere in its range, the Yellowbilled Egret was considered by Del Hoyo *et al.* (1992) to be particularly sensitive to human disturbance at breeding colonies.

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Recorded in 1105 grid cells, 24.4%  
Total number of records: 10 498  
Mean reporting rate for range: 10.4%

#### Reporting rates for vegetation types



