

Visit to an Egret Rookery.

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HEARING that Egrets and other birds were nesting near Moree I took occasion to visit the district at the end of January, 1925. I found that a fair number of birds had taken possession of a number of Acacia trees, that had recently been inundated by the backing up of the Gwydir River. This spot is about twelve miles from the Moree township, and some distance away from the large heronry visited by the late Mr. F. C. Morse and Mr. H. A. Mawhiney (*Emu*, XXII., p. 36.)

The big White Egrets (*Egretta alba*) although not numerous, stood out conspicuously, and were a beautiful sight as they moved round with their slow and measured flight, or stalked about in the long grass. Two of this species spiralled round until almost out of sight and then drifted off in a southerly direction. More numerous were the Little Egrets (*E. garzetta*) and there were also a good many of the beautiful Plumed Egrets (*E. intermedia*). The rookery, which was four or five acres in extent, also contained a few Nankeen Herons (*Nycticorax caledonicus*); Little Pied and Little Black Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucus* and *P. ater*); two or three White Ibis (*Threskiornis molucca*) and one nest of the Australian Darter (*Anhinga novæ-hollandiæ*).

The Egrets were nesting indiscriminately about the trees, the nests for the most part being rather frail structures. A few nests contained fledgling birds, though most of the young were ready to fly. The Cormorants were together in the centre of the heronry, but the Darter was on the extreme edge. The White Ibis, which were nesting in the trees, had several young on the wing and two clutches of three eggs.

The nest of the Darter was built of fairly heavy sticks and placed about 20 feet up in an acacia tree. The old birds were wary and seldom showed themselves while we were in the vicinity. Three youngsters, one of which was about a third bigger than the other two, having outgrown the original platform, were sitting still and expressionless on a bough pretending that they were part of the landscape. On climbing up and focussing the camera on them, they promptly dived into the water and disappeared. Although careful watch was kept, neither their course under the water or any sign of where they came to the surface could be detected, but presently a faint whistling, not unlike the sound made by a tree frog, was heard in a patch of reeds some 35 yards away, and here we managed to secure the bird that appears in the photograph. It was covered in soft down, pale fawn in colour, with the wing and tail feathers just maturing. The large webbed feet, which were also fawn coloured, were a conspicuous feature. (See Plate 5, Fig. 1.)

As one waded under the nests, the young birds generally regurgitated their last meal, and this gave an interesting insight into their food. The Egrets were chiefly feeding on grasshoppers, great numbers of which were seen on the green grass at the edge of the swamp. A Nankeen Heron ejected a number of small fish (*Pseudomugil signifer*), while the Cormorants dropped fresh-water crayfish and common carp. A young Ibis dropped a mouse.