

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

White heron: pp 87-88.



WHITE HERON

Family Ardeidae

Species *Egretta alba*

Common names White Heron, Kotuku, Great White Egret (Australia)

Status Native

Abundance Uncommon

Size 910 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, White-faced Heron 670 mm)

Habitat In late summer, after breeding is over, birds spread to harbours and estuaries in ones and twos. It is in these habitats that they are most easily

observed. Also encountered inland near lakes and waterways.

Worldwide range Found throughout much of the world including Australia where it is common. In New Zealand it is rare so regarded as something special. As well as the White Heron, New Zealand now has three other white coloured herons. These are the Little Egret (*E. garzetta*), the Plumed Egret (*E. intermedia*), and the Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*).

New Zealand range Throughout New Zealand.

Description

Upper and underparts White. **Bill** Black in breeding birds but yellow in non-breeding birds. **Legs and feet** Black. Yellowish-green above the knees in breeding birds. Juveniles have all black legs.

Conspicuous features

- A large all-white heron. (The biggest of the white coloured egrets.)
- Has kinked neck, somewhere near the middle vertebrate.
- Yellow bill and black legs in non-breeding birds.
- White back plumes in breeding plumaged birds.

Nest A colonial nester making a nest of twigs in a tree. Up to 4 bluish-green eggs are laid.

Nesting site and population The New Zealand population sustains its numbers from a small breeding population of around 50 pairs which nest in a forested area at the head of the Okarito Lagoon in South Westland in the South Island. This breeding site is inaccessible except by boat.

Where to find – North Island

Northern estuaries – Expect over winter.

South Auckland – Miranda often has one or two in winter. P. 303.

Bay of Plenty – Matata Lagoon Often one on the lagoon or at the Tarawera river-mouth. P. 320.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – In Nelson area often seen in the estuaries of the Marlborough Sounds and at Motueka Estuary near the town. P. 344.

Canterbury – Lake Ellesmere at Timberyard Road. P. 351, 352.

Westland – The Okarito breeding colony can be reached by boat in the spring and summer months. Visits to it are limited to only small numbers of people daily. The boat leaves from just north of Whataroa. An excursion to this place is easily arranged and considered a tourist highlight in the region. See more about it in the back of the book. P. 373.