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ON THE FOOD OF NESTLING CATTLE EGRETS

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This paper reports on the analyses of food samples of nestling Cattle Egrets *Ardeola ibis*. The samples were collected during the latter half of November, 1965, at a heronry near Paarl, south-western Cape.

Like many other members of the heron-family, young Cattle Egrets regurgitate food when alarmed. The collection of samples was incidental to ringing operations and other work which necessitated the handling of nestlings.

The food samples, which ranged in weight (wet) from 3 gm. to 26 gm. (mean = 13.5 gm.), were obtained from 15 different nestlings whose ages varied between 3 days and 27 days.

Classification of the insects, listed in Table 2, is based, essentially, on that given in Imm's *Text-book of Entomology* (9th Ed., 1957). Thanks are due to Dr. J. G. Theron, of the Department of Entomology, University of Stellenbosch, for helping with the identification of certain specimens.

Table 1 shows that insects constituted the Egrets' main food. Grasshoppers accounted for 84.6% of all the insects taken; with very few exceptions these varied in length between 15 mm. and 30 mm. The largest frog taken measured 65 mm. (body length).

TABLE 1
THE FOOD OF NESTLING CATTLE EGRETS

Food Items	No. taken	Percentage by number	Percentage by volume
Insecta	1,022	88.5%	71.0%
Arachnida	113	9.8%	4.1%
Amphibia	15	1.3%	14.7%
Aves	4	0.4%	10.2%
	1,154	100.0%	100.0%

TABLE 2
THE FOOD OF NESTLING CATTLE EGRETS

Food Items	No. taken	Percentage by number	Percentage by volume	No. of samples in which present
INSECTA		%	%	
<i>Orthoptera—Acrididae—Grasshoppers</i> ...	864	77.60	56.0	13
<i>Orthoptera—Gryllidae—Crickets</i> ...	30			7
<i>Orthoptera—Tettigoniidae—Koringkriek</i> ...	1			1
<i>Lepidoptera—Pieridae—Butterflies</i> ...	10	3.70	4.8	1
<i>Lepidoptera—Noctuidae—Cutworm moths</i> ...	1			1
<i>Lepidoptera (Ad.)</i> ...	8			5
<i>Lepidoptera (larvae)</i> ...	22			4
<i>Lepidoptera (pupae)</i> ...	2			1
<i>Coleoptera—Scarabaeidae—Chafers and Scarabs</i> ...	3	2.60	3.7	2
<i>Coleoptera—Coccinellidae—Ladybirds</i> ...	4			1
<i>Coleoptera—Carabidae—Groundbeetles</i> ...	2			1
<i>Coleoptera—Tenebrionidae</i> ...	2			1
<i>Coleoptera—Hydrophilidae—Waterbeetles</i> ...	2			1
<i>Coleoptera (Ad.)</i> ...	3			1
<i>Coleoptera (larvae)</i> ...	14			1
<i>Diptera—Tabanidae—Horse-flies</i> ...	9	2.60	2.4	3
<i>Diptera—Calliphoridae—Blow-flies</i> ...	5			2
<i>Diptera—Tachinidae</i> ...	3			2
<i>Diptera—Bombyliidae—Bee-flies</i> ...	1			1
<i>Diptera—Asilidae—Robber-flies</i> ...	2			1
<i>Diptera (Ad.)</i> ...	4			2
<i>Diptera (larvae)</i> ...	6			4
<i>Odonata—Dragonflies and Mayflies</i> ...	6	0.80	2.0	4
<i>Odonata—(nymphs)</i> ...	3			1
<i>Dictyoptera—Blattidae—Roaches</i> ...	2	0.50	1.1	2
<i>Dictyoptera—Mantidae—Praying Mantids</i> ...	4			2
<i>Hymenoptera—Formicidae—Ants</i> ...	5	0.08	1.0	1
<i>Phasmida—Stick-insects</i> ...	1			1
<i>Hemiptera—Jassidae—Leafhoppers</i> ...	1			1
<i>Neuroptera—Myrmeleonidae—Antlions</i> ...	1			1
<i>Psocoptera</i> ...	1	0.08		1
ARACHNIDA				
<i>Araneida—Spiders</i> ...	112	9.70	4.1	6
<i>Acarina—Exodidae—Ticks (engorged ♀)</i> ...	1	0.08		1
AMPHIBIA				
<i>Anura—Frogs—Rana</i> ...	15	1.30	14.7	5
AVES				
Galliformes				
<i>Numida meleagris</i> (chick c. 3 days old) ...	1	0.49	10.2	1
<i>Francolinus capensis</i> (chick c. 3 days old)...	2			1
<i>Ardeola ibis</i> (head only very small chick)	1 part			
	1,154	100	100	