

Flocking of egrets in shrimp waste drying yards of Alappuzha, Kerala

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Coastal and sea birds form an integral part of the marine ecosystem. Though occurrence of different avian fauna has been reported sporadically, detailed information on their interactions with the ecosystem is not extensively studied. The cattle egret *Bubulcus ibis* is commonly seen in paddy fields and wetlands in association with grazing cattle to catch the insects from the grassland disturbed by the moving cattle. In a recent survey in central Kerala, these egrets were seen in big flocks on the beaches.

Shrimps form an important fishery along Kerala coast. The shrimps caught by the trawlers are initially processed in peeling sheds. The shrimp waste which accumulates forms an important raw material in poultry feed and as manure is dried on the beaches. The shrimp exoskeleton can be used for extracting chitosan having commercial importance. There are more than 24 primary processing units between Ambalapuzha and Arattupuzha stretch of Kerala coast. On 24th October, 2014 a large flock of egrets were seen in the shrimp waste drying yards of Alappuzha district feeding on the semi-dried waste as well as the flies in the drying yard (Fig. 1 and 2). Every day two to three truck loads of dry shrimp wastes, packed in gunny bags are transported from here to Salem, Tamil Nadu for making poultry feed. The egrets largely nest on the *Casuarina* trees on the beach and their droppings which are rich in phosphate and other nutrients/minerals contribute to the productivity of intertidal waters and wet lands by nutrient enrichment through run off and tidal inundations.



Figs. 1 a-c. Egrets in shrimp waste drying yards of Alappuzha district, Kerala