

**Request:** Remove the cattle egret from the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918.

**Description:** Cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) are a type of heron, originally from Asia, Africa, and parts of Europe. Due to rapid expansion, they have become common around the world within the past century. On February 6, 2008, the Global Invasive Species Database recognized cattle egrets as an invasive species. Bird Life International and the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species considers them to be a "Least Concern" species for extinction. Cattle egrets are a part of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. During the nesting season, they cannot be hunted or otherwise disturbed.



Cattle egrets have few if any predators, and competition comes from nesting. Cattle egrets can lay a clutch of one to five eggs, though typically three or four. Sibling rivalry is intense, usually resulting in death by starvation of the third, fourth, and fifth chicks. The dead chick is then thrown out of the nest with other waste, presenting hazards to public health.

Cattle egrets can be helpful to cattle ranchers as they do eat pests, but they spread diseases such as heartwater, infectious bursal disease, and Newcastle disease. Cattle egrets are problematic in other regions with large cattle populations. They are also dangerous near airports due to the threat they pose to small aircraft. They are nuisances in other regions of the Central Valley and Bay Area, as well as the Midwest, particularly northern Texas and Oklahoma.

**Necessity:** Cattle Egrets present a significant health hazard to the people of Gustine. While the egrets nest across Gustine, the most concentrated area contains approximately 500-600 birds within less than a quarter acre in Harry Schmidt Park. Cattle egrets leave excessive feces, fallen eggs, and deceased chicks. The City rents two popular facilities in the park: the Goman Center and Petersen Shelter. Due to the factors above, the City has lost revenue for both facilities. Most residents are driven away by the foul odor, noise, and other physical remains as described. Residents have also expressed health concerns, not only from the potential diseases an egret may carry, but from the many bacterial and viral illnesses that can come from exposure to feces. The birds' proximity to playgrounds and recreational fields and paths emphasize these concerns. The City has done everything in its power to keep the park clean, but it is difficult to maintain due to the sheer volume of birds. In 2017, city staff cleaned up an average of fifty dead egret chicks each day.



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The City of Gustine carries out various mitigation efforts, all of which stop the moment the first nest is found. In early 2017, the City of Gustine used the following tactics:

- Tree shaking and aggressive pruning
- Propane Cannon
- Hawk kite over the Goman center
- Grape seed extract as an irritant
- Streamers tied to trees
- Lasers and flashing lights
- Predator noises over a loudspeaker

All of these tactics were completely unsuccessful. In early 2018, the City of Gustine tried the following:

- Aggressive pruning
- Installation of Owl Boxes
- Use of a more powerful bird predator noise maker
- Removal of old nests
- Introduction of dogs into parks

The City of Gustine has worked with many groups to attempt to control the growing problem. This list includes the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Merced County Ag Commissioner's Office, the Merced County District Attorney's Office, Congressman Costa, and Assembly member Adam Grey.

Removing the cattle egret would allow the City to respond to protect public health and economy. The cattle egrets, if removed from Gustine, would be safe to roost in the nearby Great Valley Grasslands State Park, San Luis National Wildlife Refuge, Merced National Wildlife Refuge, and the Los Banos Waterfowl Management Area. The City of Gustine is asking for federal assistance in mitigating the problem before serious health conditions arise.

