

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Waterbirds are an essential component of wetland landscapes. Their beauty, rich diversity, abundance, and migratory habits are closely linked to many of our cultural values and social practices. Their tendency to gather together, often in spectacular concentrations, has made them a target of research and monitoring and consequently provides us with an excellent indicator of the value and health of wetland ecosystems, with total 871 species distributed around the world (Wetland International, 2012).

Out of hundreds of species of waterbirds, Egrets are a group of waterbirds from order *Pelecaniformes* that live close to humans. Many Egrets are members of the genera *Egretta*, *Ardea* or *Bulbucus* which also contain other species named as Herons rather than Egrets the distinction referring to the long filamentous feathers that seem to cascade down an egret's back during the breeding season.

Most Egrets live in tropical and subtropical regions; this group almost evenly distributed throughout Indonesia (Mackinnon, Phillipps, Balen, 1998). The Herons are the most cosmopolitan family, some being found even on remote oceanic islands (Landsborough, 2018). Egrets in general consist of species of birds whose lives depend on the wetlands, Both natural wetlands and artificial wetlands, including mangrove forests, swamps, muddy plains, lakes, ponds, rice fields, and others. Where offshore and swamp area usually used as a roosting area, and other areas as feeding site (Rusila-Noor, Khazali, and Suryadiputra, 1999).

In Indonesia, rice field becomes one of important feeding site of Egrets, since rice field provides much variety of food all year long. According to research by Febriana (2014) regarding the description of feeding sites of three species of Egret in Baitussalam and Darussalam Sub-districts of Aceh Besar District, which showed that the location of feeding three species Egrets (*A.alba*, *E. garzetta*, and *B. ibis*) are rice fields. The level of presence of three Egrets in ponds ranges from infrequent to

absolute (often present), while in the rice field area there is an absolute level of attendance (often present) — that show how important rice field to those species.

Rice field itself not always in constant condition due to the cultivation process; this made the existence of food in the rice field not constant. Those inconsistencies are also affecting the present of Egret itself. Since 2014 the number of rice fields in Indonesia has been increasing gradually until 2017 Indonesia has a loss of 150 to 200 hectares of rice field due to repurpose the area into housing or industrial site. Made it harder for Egrets to find a stable and enough food source and feeding site to survive.

Based on the description above, it is necessary to analyze the presence and behavior of the Egrets in rice fields in Padang.

1.2 Formulation of the problem

Based on the background described, the problems that can be formulated in this study are:

1. What species of Egrets that presence in rice fields?
2. How is the present comparison of Egrets in different stages of rice field cultivation phase
3. What Egrets do in the rice fields?

1.3 Research Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

1. To know species of Egrets that presence in the rice field.
2. To compare the presence of Egrets in different stages of rice field cultivation.
3. To find out what activities are done by Egrets in the rice fields.

1.4 Benefits of Research

The benefits of this study are to provide the latest information on species, presence, and behavior of Egrets in the different stages of rice field cultivation as a reference to a policymaker about re-purposing rice field area.