



“In the course of an hour, we watched perhaps 10 or more such fishing attempts, most of which were successful.” GRANT ATKINSON



GRANT ATKINSON (5)

Herons are renowned for waiting for their prey to swim into range, but they also have several other foraging techniques in their arsenals, some of which allow them to feed in water that is too deep to wade in.

Wilderness guide and photographer **Grant Atkinson** encountered a large group of wading birds feeding around a pool in the north-western Okavango Delta

in Botswana. With ibis, herons and egrets ringing the shallows, most of the small fish trapped in the pool took refuge in deep water in the centre. Some of the Great Egrets responded by stabbing at the fish while flying slowly over the pool. One egret caught a fish, dropped it, and then managed to catch it again with a second strike.

Aerial foraging is energetically expensive, and is easier for smaller species such as

Little Egrets, but birds up to the size of Grey Herons do feed in this manner. Herons and egrets can also feed while swimming, which probably is less expensive, but perhaps not as efficient because it scares the fish.

The presence of a 2.5-metre Nile crocodile in the pool may also have deterred any swimming.

PETER RYAN □

