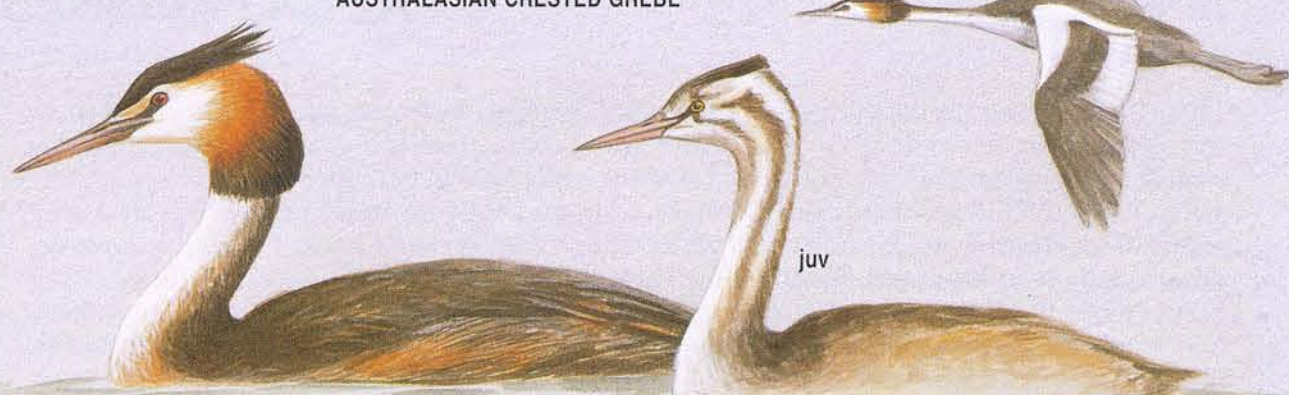


Freshwater diving birds with a distinctive silhouette – dumpy body, low to the water, with rounded rear end because of no visible tail; bill pointed; head held erect. Sexes alike. They feed underwater, propelled by special lobed feet. As their legs are set well back, they are awkward on land and seldom venture onto it. Patter across the water when disturbed or during displays, but can fly well at night. Gather in loose flocks in autumn and winter. Silent. Nests are bulky floating structures, often attached to emergent or overhanging vegetation. Lay 2–4 chalky white eggs, staining to brown; covered whenever the adult leaves the nest. Chicks are carried on an adult's back when very small. Young have striped heads, through to the age of independence.

HOARY-HEADED GREBE *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus* **Rare Australian vagrant**

28 cm, 250 g. Similar to NZ Dabchick in size and habits; *much paler and slimmer* than other small grebes. Breeding adult dark grey above, breast pale buff, *head prominently streaked silver* (hoary), eye not contrasting; bill tipped white. Non-breeding adult *pale grey with contrasting grey-brown cap to below eye* and extending as a dark stripe from the crown down the hindneck; bill pinkish. Regularly swims with thin neck held erect. **Habitat:** Lakes and farm ponds. [Sp 6]

AUSTRALASIAN CRESTED GREBE



NEW ZEALAND DABCHICK



HOARY-HEADED GREBE



AUSTRALASIAN LITTLE GREBE



GREBES

Podicipedidae

20 species; 4 in New Zealand region, including 1 endemic.

An ancient group of diving birds, quite unrelated to the family Anatidae (swans, geese, ducks), grebes may have diverged early

on from the lineage that gave rise to the penguins, petrels, pelicans and storks.

Grebes are aquatic specialists, usually living on clear, shallow freshwater lakes and ponds, particularly those with mud, clay or sand on the bottom and emergent or floating

vegetation. Their lobed toes (not webbed) propel and steer them underwater. Their tails are a vestigial tuft only, not a rudder. Their large feet are set well back, making them efficient swimmers but clumsy on land, which they avoid. Their small narrow wings are not used in swimming but are used for flight, mainly at night. In winter, many gather on large lakes or (seldom in New Zealand) in estuaries and harbours.

Sexes are alike, but males are larger than females on average and have longer bills. Fish-eating grebes have long, pointed bills, whereas invertebrate-eaters have short, stubby bills. Most, especially fish-eaters, swallow their own feathers, especially breast and flank feathers,

which may help in the forming of pellets.

The nest is a mass of sodden waterweed and sticks, attached to submerged or emergent vegetation. The eggs, laid at intervals of about two days, are white but soon become stained brown. They are covered with vegetation when the bird leaves the nest. Young chicks often ride on their parents' backs. The chicks of almost all grebes have stripes on the head and neck, remnants of which remain for several months after they have become independent juveniles. After breeding, most grebes moult all their flight feathers at once and so are flightless for several weeks; presumably true of New Zealand grebes also.

6. HOARY-HEADED GREBE *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus* **Plate 2**

Size: 28 cm, 250 g

Distribution: Australia, mostly south of 20°S, and in Tasmania. First New Zealand records were in 1975, at The Snares and at Lake Horowhenua. A pair bred near Te Anau in 1975–76, and later two pairs bred until 1978. In the late 1970s, there were many widely scattered sightings, mostly of single birds that did not stay long, from Northland to Southland. Records after 1980 are few and mainly in the South Island, but to date they have

failed to become established.

Breeding: Similar to New Zealand Dabchick. In Australia, they lay 4–5 eggs (40 x 28 mm, 16 g), mostly in October–January, and chicks are recorded November–February.

Feeding: Their diet of aquatic invertebrates taken underwater is similar to that of the New Zealand Dabchick.

Reading: Storer, R.W. 1987. *Emu* 87: 150–157.