

A NEW BIRD FOR NEW ZEALAND — AUSTRALIAN LITTLE GREBE, AT ARROWTOWN

By G. R. CHANCE

On 21/4/1968 Mr. Marsh Small observed a dabchick of apparent Australian origin on a dam near Arrowtown. Seven months later, following Mr. Small's directions on the afternoon of 29/11/68 I was able to locate this attractive visitor without difficulty. Later I set up a hide from which I obtained photographs which allowed a positive identification to be made.

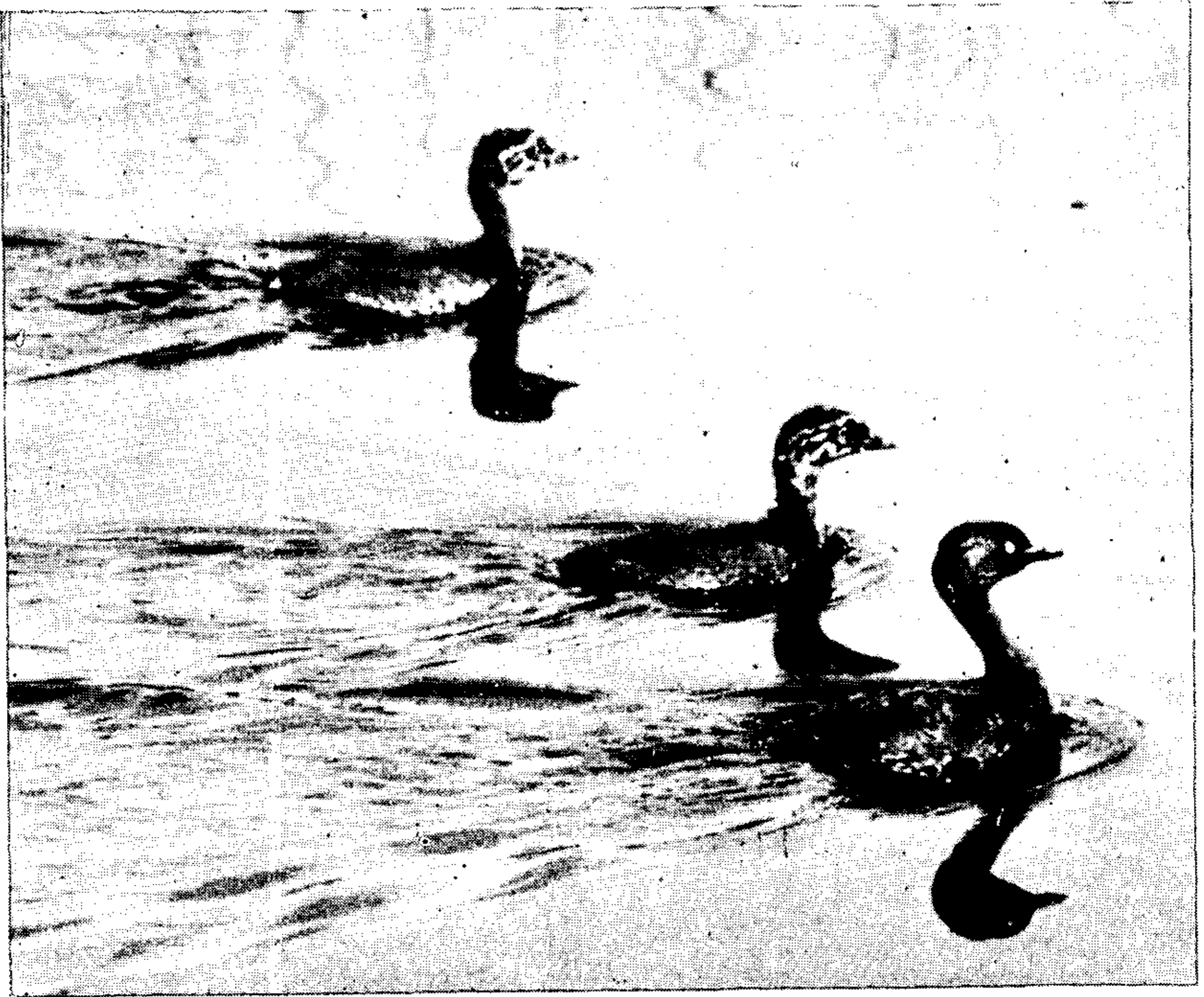
The dam, about 150 yards long and of lesser width, held a pair of Coot (*F. atra*) at each end. The Little Grebe was closely associated with a pair of Coot who were about to build a nest under some willows, and followed their activities with great interest, particularly when they invaded the territory of the other Coot. As if sensing a relationship with the Coot, it ignored the presence of waterfowl; Mallard, Grey Duck, Shoveller, Grey Teal and Scaup.

The Little Grebe was in full breeding plumage and the most obvious characteristic was the yellow patch from the base of the bill



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Plate I — Australian Dabchick (*Podiceps novae-hollandiae*) near Arrowtown on 30/11/1968.



[Gavin Woodward

Plate II — New Zealand Dabchick (***Podiceps rufopectus***) on a small lagoon on the Wellington coast. Note the intricate pattern on the heads of the two well-grown youngsters.

to below the eye. This patch gave a singular appearance from a direct frontal view. The iris was orange and the bill was black with a pearly tip. The head and neck was grey except for a chestnut stripe originating from a base, half-way down the side of the neck and coming to a point behind the eyes. The throat was black as its alternative name would suggest. The wings were grey and the undersurface of the wings and body cloudy white. The feathers on the back were brown tipped with black, gradually merging to a lighter brown on the sides, giving an unusual fluffy, hairlike impression.

Its low trajectory flight was reminiscent in power of that of the Crested Grebe, reacting under similar circumstances. When stimulated it gave a long 'chittering' call, at first unexpected, but in character with this alert bird. An expert diver for periods of about 20 seconds, except when disturbed when it would dive and surface under cover, or sink hull down in surface weed making detection difficult.

From my observation made during two week-ends it would appear, that given the opportunity, this species would adapt well to conditions in New Zealand. It was still present on 17/1/69.