

NOTES ON A CRESTED GREBE'S NEST AT LAKE MAPOURIKA

By *GEORGE CHANCE*

The Crested Grebe's nest was inspected by the Gibb boys of Waiho from their canoe on 24/12/68. It contained three eggs. Two days later they observed that a fourth and what proved to be the final egg had been laid.

The nest was situated in a small bay immediately south of the jetty near the main road. This area is the natural stopping and picnic place and it is used for launching boats and by water skiers.

The bay is rimmed with flax and has some raupo by the creek mouth. This provided material for the base of the nest, which was constructed on a drifted tree stump firmly embedded in mud about fifty feet from the lake edge and adjacent to the creek outlet. Protection from wave action came from the curve of the bay and to the north from a sand bar formed by the creek. The nest was not the usual floating raft-type construction that I have observed in Canterbury. The upper part of the cone was formed of raupo, dressed with lake weed which was constantly replenished giving a fresh green appearance to the nest.

When I arrived at Lake Mapourika on 19/1/69, I found that the nest was occupied, and I set about working my floating hide into a suitable position. For two days there was no sign of the second adult and it was not until the first chicken was hatched on the morning of the 21st that the pair was reunited. Almost immediately after the hatching the female left the nest calling hoarsely and stridently for her mate, who was a considerable distance away in the next bay. From that time both birds were in constant attendance.

The chicks were hatched at daily intervals and the nest was abandoned after the arrival of the fourth chick on 24th January. The young soon climb up between the brooding parent's back and wings which are arched in a 'tent' position as if to assist a satisfactory lodgment. The feeding of feathers, whitebait and smelt began almost immediately. But, after the first hatching, it was impossible to determine the order. From my observations it appeared the feather came first. The brooding bird plucked a breast feather and presented it to the nestling which frequently had difficulty in making the initial swallow. On occasions, when the feather was lost or blown away it was retrieved with amazing dexterity and returned. The same ability was demonstrated by the sitting grebe taking a dragon fly on the wing.

The attending bird was responsible for feeding the young which responded to the low call note as the adult approached the nest and partially emerged from under the wing to receive the fish offering. The sight of the young 'stripe heads,' high, dry, and safe on the back of the brooding bird is yet another fascinating aspect of the grebe family. The over-riding instinct of the young is to climb upwards; and although capable of swimming if deposited in the water during the change-over, they set about climbing back up the side of the nest to the security of the under-wing position.

No definite conclusion has been reached as to the object of feather feeding. In 1924, Westmore noted that the pyloric lobe of the stomach is almost invariably plugged with feathers and went on to suggest that the feathers act as a strainer to prevent fish bones or large pieces of chitin from entering the intestine.



[G. R. Chance

Plate VIII — Crested Grebe on nest at Lake Mapourika, offering downy
feather to chick.



[G. R. Chance

Plate IX — The offering of a downy feather is accepted.



[G. R. Chance

Plate X — The other parent arrives while the downy feather is being swallowed.



I. G. R. Chance

Plate XI — Adult climbs on to the nest and offers a small fish.