

FIRST SIGHTINGS OF THE HOARY-HEADED GREBE
(*Podiceps policephalus*) IN NEW ZEALAND

Recently there have been three reported sightings of a new species of grebe in the New Zealand region. The first was made at The Snares (on the east coast of Main Island) some 105 km southward of Stewart Island and was reported by B. D. Bell in Classified Summarised Notes (*Notornis* 22 (4): 314; 1975).

At 0735 hrs (NZST), 11 February 1975, Dr D. S. Horning informed me of a strange bird he had just seen swimming around in the sea of Boat Harbour. After studying the bird for 90 minutes with the aid of 7 x 35 binoculars at a range of 3-20 m, I made the following description.

General Appearance:

Similar to the New Zealand Dabchick (*Podiceps rufopectus*) in size and build.

Bill colour:

Pale yellow-grey on the lower mandible, darkening towards the dorsal surface of the upper mandible.

Head plumage:

A broad band of grey-brown extended from the base of the upper mandible, over the crown and down to the nape. The sides of the head were clad in short, square-ended, pale straw-coloured plumes which protruded through and almost completely covered the underlying grey-brown contour feathers.

Back and wings:

Grey-brown as for the crown and nape, with an indistinct, pale cream-grey wing bar at the tip of the folded wing.

Sides, flanks and rump:

Light grey-brown.

Chin, throat, breast, belly and undertail coverts:

Very pale grey, almost white.

Behaviour:

For most of the time the bird had a compact pose, with its head tucked down on top of the shoulders, and bill lying on the chest. The bird did not appear to be concerned by the short, choppy 1-1.5 m high swell. On the six occasions the podiceps dived it stayed underwater for 8-15 seconds. The bird did not bring any food to the surface and underwater visibility at the time was poor as the sea was stained from peat washed into the sea by recent rain.

Red-billed Gulls, Southern Skuas and Antarctic Terns nesting nearby, and the few fur seals and sea-lions in Boat Harbour, seemed to disregard the newcomer, nor did it show any reaction to their presence.

Although the bird was seen later in the day, it was not sighted subsequently and its fate was unknown.

Reference to Frith (1969, *Birds in the Australian High Country*, Sydney: Reed), Slater (1970, *Field Guide to Australian Birds. Non-Passerines*, Adelaide: Rigby) and MacDonald (1973, *Birds of Australia*, Sydney: Reed), as well as consultation with Mr F. C. Kinsky of the National Museum (who, with Mr B. D. Bell, of the Wildlife Service, confirmed the identifications of the two subsequent reports), indicate that the strange podiceps was a Hoary-headed Grebe (*Podiceps poliocephalus*), a resident of Australia and Tasmania.

The second sighting of a Hoary-headed Grebe, in winter plumage, was made by Mr E. B. Jones at Horowhenua Lake on 17 June 1975, and 5 July 1975. The last reported sighting of the new grebe was made of two birds by Stuart Sutherland, of the Southland Acclimatisation Society, and J. M. Neilson, of the Department of Internal Affairs, while inspecting a flood retention dam at Lagoon Creek, Southland (map reference NZMS 1, S150 1902 3120) on 18 November 1975. The nesting of these birds has since been followed by Mrs Maida Barlow, of Invercargill, and her report appears elsewhere in this issue of *Notornis*.

H. A. BEST

*Wildlife Service,
Department of Internal Affairs,
Private Bag,
Wellington*

BREEDING OF HOARY-HEADED GREBE IN SOUTHLAND

On 18 November 1975 Messrs. Stuart Sutherland (Southland Acclimatisation Society) and J. M. Neilson (Department of Internal Affairs) saw two small grebes on the Lagoon Creek detention dam in the Te Anau area, 15 km from Te Anau and 130 km from Invercargill. They identified the birds provisionally as Hoary-headed Grebes (*Podiceps poliocephalus*). Messrs Sutherland and R. R. Sutton revisited the area on 19 December without finding the birds. They investigated other possible habitats in the district and eventually located the birds on the Dawson detention dam, a 3-hectare dam which has been in existence for about four years. The two dams are 4.6 km apart.

On 3 January 1976, Messrs Sutton, Grant Allan, Mervyn Jukes and the writer made the trip to the Dawson dam. In the shimmering heat the dam and adjacent marsh seemed alive with water birds, including about 750 Paradise Ducks (*Tadorna variegata*), nearly half of them in flightless moult. They spent the day cruising in flotillas, a spangled backdrop to cur day. Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and Shoveler (*Anas rhynchos*), 30+ Pied Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*), 50+ South Island Pied Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*) and 55+ Spurwinged Plovers (*Lobibyx novaehollandiae*) added colour and cacaphony. A flock of about 100 Black-billed Gulls (*Larus bulleri*),