

Crested Grebe and Coot Nesting in Tasmania

By J. R. NAPIER, St. Marys, Tasmania.

The Crested Grebe, *Podiceps cristatus*, is in no way considered common in Tasmania, and up to December 1971, has not been recorded nesting in this state. M. S. R. Sharland (1958), in discussing this species, indicates that in his experience it tends to prefer the highland lakes, and gives Great Lake and Interlaken as definite sightings. He also notes its occurrence in coastal areas in winter. P. Bolger (1963), gives some interesting figures in relation to one coastal area, Pittwater, drawing attention to an increase in the population over the winter period. His records culminate in a count of 225 birds in July 1960. The writer's only records prior to December, 1971 were for coastal areas, and then only an odd bird or two.

Following a news item in the Hobart *Mercury*, a visit was made

to Lake Dulverton at Oatlands, a town midway between Hobart and Launceston, on December 11, 1971. Lake Dulverton lies at an altitude of 1,000 feet, and has an estimated area of 700 to 800 acres. It is not very deep, but varies from year to year, there being a retaining wall at its outlet. Rarely does the water spill over this wall. It is estimated that the depth of water in December 1971 would be approximately 10 feet maximum. There is a prolific growth of Water Ribbon, *Triglochin procera* over the lake, but this is kept cut back in the centre to allow aquatic sports, hence leaving a band of about 30 yards in width round the periphery. The western shore of the lake is in the township of Oatlands and an esplanade runs the full length of this shore, giving ready access. In addition it is a popular fishing lake, and is a sanctuary for animals and birds.

On December 11, 1971, a survey along the western shore from the esplanade revealed seven nests of Crested Grebe, with the birds incubating. These nests varied from 8 to 30 yards from the shore, and were all well hidden in the Water Ribbon. In spite of this the brooding birds were easy to see, their pale necks being visible from a considerable distance. An investigation in a small boat to two of these nests revealed five eggs in each, one egg of one clutch being chipped. The adults were extremely quiet, not leaving their eggs until the boat was within 15 feet, and then swimming close by, uttering guttural oaths of indignation.

A further visit to the area on December 19, found an aquatic carnival in progress. However, the Grebes did not appear to be disturbed by the rough water and were carrying out their domestic duties. Some of the nests seen on December 11, had hatched and two adults were noted carrying chicks on their backs. One new nest was found with four eggs, this being very close to the shore and below a steep bank giving ideal opportunities for observation. There were still five nests in occupation on December 28, and two pairs again noted carrying chicks on their backs; these birds were now in the open water beyond the weed limit.

Another visit on January 1, 1972 in company with L. Hill, revealed only two nests in occupation and several birds with chicks. One pair had five young now at least one-third grown and diving. Hill camped on the shore of the lake for two nights and, of course, had an excellent chance of assessing the birds in greater detail. In correspondence he says that on January 2 and 3, he located eight active Grebe nests in the area under review, with a maximum clutch of four eggs. This was where we had seen only two nests on the 1st.

Several hurried visits were made to Lake Dulverton between March 3 and June 8, 1972, adults and young birds being noted each time. On March 3 the situation was again discussed with Hill, who had been camping on the shore of the lake again for three days. He had over ten active nests under observation, and this must represent a second nesting for this colony of Crested Grebe. At least two of these nests were active on March 14, and several other birds were seen with young. A month later, April 10, no active nests could be seen but most of the adults were accompanied by young birds, the maximum



Crested Grebe nesting at Oatlands at an altitude of 1000 feet. The first nesting recorded in Tasmania.

Plate 3

Photo by J. R. Napier

brood seen being three. A quick look on April 22, showed no change except in the size of the young. There were still many chicks present on May 8, and some adults seemed to be acquiring winter plumage. By June 8, there was only one pair feeding young, a large noisy adolescent. The remainder of the birds were spread over the whole study area, near the Oatlands township, in both open water and among the Water Ribbon which, by this time, had died back considerably.

Attention is drawn to the very hurried and limited nature of the visits to Lake Dulverton over this period, and it is acknowledged that the area deserved far better attention than was possible over this six month period. Also, it must be noted that only a quarter mile of the lake was under observation, and it must be reasonable to expect Crested Grebe to be present on other parts of the lake more remote from human interference.

These records constitute a large expansion in the breeding range of the Crested Grebe and hope is expressed that this colony may remain, at least while there is ample water in the lake.

Coot, *Fulica atra* have always occurred on Lake Dulverton, at times in big numbers. Nevertheless there is a dearth of breeding records not only at this lake, but in the whole of Tasmania.

While observing the Crested Grebe on December 11, 1971, attention was drawn to the Coots carrying weed, and soon a nest was loca-

ted containing four eggs. This was in the Water Ribbon but further from the shore than the Grebes. On December 28, another nest containing seven eggs was located, which by January 1, was hatching. Over the New Year period, Hill found seven Coots nests with a maximum clutch of eight eggs. These nests were all situated in the same part of the lake as the Grebes referred to above. The Coots nests were much harder to see than the Grebes, as the brooding bird pulled the Water Ribbons down over itself completely obscuring everything.

Breeding records of the Coot in Tasmania are rare. The late Miss J. A. Fletcher records them nesting in a lagoon at Cleveland in the north of the state in the spring of 1909. A subsequent comment on this discovery is made by her sister in the *Emu* as recently as June, 1960. M. S. R. Sharland discusses this bird in relation to Tasmania very fully, noting a siting of a juvenile on the Coal river, in 1946. Sharland drew the writer's attention to his having seen juveniles in a small lake near Evandale during the summer of 1970.

It would appear that the nesting discovered at Lake Dulverton in December 1971, is the first where nests and eggs have been recorded in Tasmania since 1909, a period of 62 years.

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Unusual Behaviour of Young Pallid Cuckoo

By NORMAN CHAFFER, Roseville, New South Wales.

Young cuckoos are endowed with persistent begging calls which prove irresistible to many species of birds. Their plaintive wailing cries evidently trigger a feeding response which is not only confined to the cuckoo's foster parents. Casual passing birds, drawn by the wailing cries of a young cuckoo, may also be induced to feed the importunate youngster.

An unusual incident, or at least one rarely observed, involving a young Pallid Cuckoo, *Cuculus pallidus*, and a nesting White-shafted Fantail, *Rhipidura fuliginosa*, came under my notice on January 7, 1968. The nest of the fantails, built about six feet from the ground in a eucalypt sapling, held three young a few days old. Perched astride the nest was a well-grown young Pallid Cuckoo, well able to fly, which advertised its presence by plaintive cheeping calls.

The fantails were working overtime capturing insects and stuffing