

Biodiversity

New Zealand dabchick (*Poliocephalus rufopectus*)



Number 4

DESCRIPTION

The New Zealand dabchick (*Poliocephalus rufopectus*) is endemic to New Zealand and is a threatened member of the grebe family, with an estimated population of 1700 birds.

The Dabchick is a shy, secretive bird and grows to around 29cm long and weighs 250g. It is usually brown-black and has streaks of silver feathers on the top of its head.

DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

The dabchick is mainly found in the North Island with an occasional vagrant in the South Island. Dabchicks are often found in lakes, dams, ponds and even sewage oxidation ponds. In North Taranaki dabchicks can be found all year round though not as frequently or in such numbers as South Taranaki.

These freshwater diving birds are aquatic specialists and hardly spend any time on land. They feed, sleep and even build their nests on water. Their floating nests are attached to emergent aquatic vegetation such as raupo, sedges or overhanging branches. Dabchicks feed on the surface or by diving under the water and their diet consists of aquatic insects, freshwater snails, crayfish and small fish. Their breeding season is usually between September and December.



BARRY HARTLEY

NEW ZEALAND DABCHICK IN TARANAKI

In Taranaki the New Zealand dabchick has a scattered distribution and occasionally one or two birds can be observed on small farm ponds throughout the region.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- If you have open ponds where dabchick are present conduct predator control to help keep pest numbers low.
- When driving a boat on freshwater lakes keep your speed below 5 knots within 200 metres of the shore to reduce boat wash and disturbance to dabchicks and their nests
- Try not to disturb dabchicks during their breeding season, which is September to December.
- Create and protect open ponds and wetlands on your property.
- Report sightings to the Taranaki Regional Council or the Ornithological Society NZ Regional Representative Barry Hartley (barry_hartley@xtra.co.nz).



ROB SUISTED

CONSERVATION

The New Zealand dabchick is a threatened species and is listed as 'nationally vulnerable'. With its small population and sparse distribution numbers are likely to continue to decline.

THREATS

Some of the common threats to the New Zealand dabchick include dogs, stoats, rats and other swimming predators. Their nests are often swamped by even small changes in water levels such as in hydro lakes or by wake from boats.

QUICK FACTS

- The Maori name is Waiwea.
- They only fly at night.
- They are generally silent apart from their chattering calls during the breeding season.
- Chicks are almost completely dependent on their parents for the first two months.
- Dabchicks are a protected species.



TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL
Biodiversity Section
Ph: 06 765 7127 Fax: 06 765 5097
Email: info@trc.govt.nz
www.trc.govt.nz

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