

BIRD IN THE HAND

by A. H. D'Andria, drawings by F. Knight, Canberra, A.C.T.

The Small Grebes

The Little Grebe *Podiceps ruficollis* and the Hoary-headed Grebe *P. poliocephalus* are sufficiently distinct in breeding plumage to be identified in the field without difficulty. In non-breeding plumage, however, most diagnostic features disappear, and as the birds occur together in mixed flocks in winter, separation becomes difficult. The following characters will assist when trying to identify these grebes in the hand.

Little Grebe

WINTER PLUMAGE

Neck: Some rufous or buff from behind eye and down the side of the neck.

Sides of face: The line of dark crown feathers passes through the centre of the eye.

Crown: A uniform dark brown overall; no white streaks.

Bill: Nostrils with rounded ends to slits.

Feathered borderline between forehead and culmen: A smooth convex curve.

Hoary-headed Grebe

WINTER PLUMAGE

Neck: No rufous on sides of neck.

Sides of face: The line of dark crown feathers passes just below the eye.

Crown: Dark brown often with an indication of white streaks on the forehead and sides. These streaks are the beginnings of the white plumes of the breeding plumage.

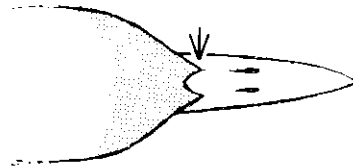
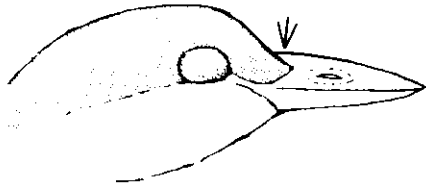
Bill: Nostrils with pointed ends.

Feathered borderline between forehead and culmen: A concave curve with the ends pointing towards the nasal groove.

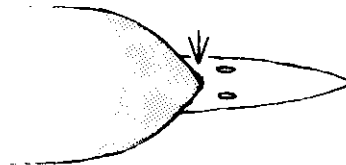
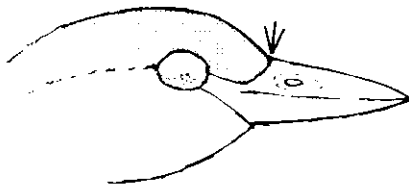
Lateral view

Dorsal view

Nostril shape
(enlarged)



Hoary-headed Grebe



Little Grebe

• Figure 1. The main diagnostic characters are shown in the illustrations. The feathered borderline between the forehead and the culmen is indicated by the arrows.

Summary

The nostril shape and the feathered borderline between forehead and culmen appear to be diagnostic characters at all ages.

Acknowledgement

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• Little Grebe on nest.

Photo: A. J. Elliott



• Hoary-headed Grebe at nest.

Photo: C. E. Bryant