

Association between feeding Hardheads and Hoary-headed Grebes

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The Hardhead *Aythya australis* feeds on a mixture of aquatic plants and animals, mostly obtained by diving, with birds leaping forward and submerging with little disturbance to the surface (Marchant & Higgins 1990: page 1354). Hoary-headed Grebes *Poliiocephalus poliocephalus* feed chiefly on aquatic arthropods, obtained chiefly (90%) by deep diving, sometimes associated with feeding herbivorous waterbirds (Marchant & Higgins 1990: page 103).

On 21 June 2013 one of us (MR), while conducting a bird survey at Deep Pond (32°52'10"S 151°43'36"E) noted an association between these two species in which an individual Hardhead was consistently accompanied by a Hoary-headed Grebe. Each time the Hardhead dived, the Hoary-headed Grebe threw itself into the air and plunged into the centre of the ripples left by the submerged Hardhead. The two birds would then be seen to surface close to each other, suggesting that the "tailing" behaviour was continued underwater. This process was repeated a number of times until the Hardhead ceased feeding. Moments after noting this behaviour and when the Hardhead began feeding again, a second Hoary-headed Grebe hurriedly approached the Hardhead. Although it did not perform the same "tailing" behaviour, the grebe was very deliberate in its reaching the Hardhead, suggesting that a feeding opportunity may have tempted the grebe to approach. Soon after this, the original grebe began the "tailing" behaviour as earlier.

Subsequently, MN observed a similar association between a lone Hardhead and three Hoary-headed Grebes on a dam at Tocal (32°37'20"S 151°35'17"E) on 11 July 2013. Again one of the grebes repeatedly dived into the ripple left by the Hardhead. The other two grebes showed interest in the activity, but it was always the same grebe which dived with the Hardhead.

Although we have observed Australasian Grebes *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* in the presence of Hardheads we have not seen evidence of this association involving synchronised diving. Australasian Grebes are known to follow other species like Eurasian Coots *Fulica atra*, Dusky Moorhens *Gallinula tenebrosa* and Pacific Black Ducks *Anas superciliosa* in weedy areas, apparently eating arthropods disturbed by the larger birds (Marchant & Higgins 1990: page 94).

Our observations relate to a unique synergy between two specialist diving species feeding in open water. Previous descriptions of feeding interactions between feeding waterbirds and small grebes often relate to surface feeding species (e.g. up-ended ducks) and surface vegetation.

REFERENCE

- Marchant, S. M., and Higgins, P. J. (Eds). (1990). 'Handbook of Australian, New Zealand and Antarctic Birds, Volume 1: Ratites to Ducks'. (Oxford University Press: Melbourne.)