

Common Name/Scientific name: **Australasian Grebe/*Tachybaptus novaehollandiae***

The Australasian Grebe is usually confined to freshwater wetlands, and can often be seen swimming singly or in twos on farm dams. They build floating nests — a platform made from green aquatic vegetation — into which bluish-white eggs are laid, sometimes by two females. When the young hatch they have striped down and proportionally oversized webbed feet, and are able to swim almost immediately. Not becoming independent for eight weeks after hatching, they follow their parents about, and they sometimes nestle onto the back of a swimming adult to rest.



Description: The Australasian Grebe is a small waterbird with two distinct plumage phases. The non-breeding plumage of both the male and female is dark grey-brown above and mostly silver-grey below, with a white oval patch of bare skin at the base of the bill. During the breeding season, both sexes have a glossy-black head and a rich chestnut facial stripe which extends from just behind the eye through to the base of the neck. At this time, the eye becomes darker and the patch of skin at the base of the bill becomes pale yellow and more noticeable. When approached, Australasian Grebes usually dive under water.

Where seen in the gardens: The Australasian Grebe is found in freshwater ponds or small waterways, so at the gardens, swimming on the lagoon.

Feeding & Behaviour in the gardens: Food consists mainly of small fish and water insects. Prey is normally caught during deep underwater dives, but some is taken on the surface. Like other grebes, the Australasian Grebe is often seen eating its own feathers and feeding them to its young. This behaviour is thought to help prevent injury from any sharp fish bones that are swallowed.

Nesting: The Australasian Grebe may raise up to three successive broods in a season. The pale blue eggs are laid in a nest which is a floating mound of vegetation, normally anchored to a submerged branch or reed. The striped downy chicks are able to swim from birth and are cared for by both parents. When parents start breeding again, however, the young of the previous brood are driven away.

Similar Species in the gardens: The birds also seen on the lagoon are the Australian Wood Duck, the Pacific Black Duck, the Australasian Grebe and Little Cormorants (Black and Pied).