

# Feather Fascination!

with local Birdwatcher, Jim Butler

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## GREBE STORY 1:

The Australasian Grebe needs this story because it is so frequently overlooked on our ponds and dams! Either it is observed and dismissed as a duckling; or not observed, because it rarely comes on land and spends such a lot of time foraging under the water surface. But it is a common bird and especially beautiful to watch as it forages and breeds out on the still water blanketed in reflections.

There are three species of grebe in Australia: Australasian, Hoary-headed and Great Crested. The Australasian is the most common because its habitat requirements are most likely to be found amongst us. The Australasian Grebe is a small freshwater bird with a transformational change to its plumage during breeding. Whilst breeding both sexes have a glossy-black head and a rich chestnut area of feathers behind the eye plus an oval patch of bright yellow facial skin. During the non-breeding season all of the feathers and skin are much

duller. As its name suggests this grebe is found throughout Australia and the Pacific.

The Australasian grebe is an excellent swimmer and diver; and usually dives immediately when alarmed and swims away under water rather than fly to safety. Food consists mainly of small fish, small crustaceans and water insects. Prey is normally caught during underwater dives. The form of their bodies is matched to diving and swimming. Their legs attach at the extreme end of the body for maximum thrust from the lobed toes. This body form is mismatched to walking because to do so efficiently the centre of mass needs to be over the feet! The grebes tend to tip forward. They are not strong flyers and only fly to relocate to another food source, doing this mostly at night to avoid predators.

Happy watching for the resurfacing grebe!

~ Jim

Photo: Australasian Grebe on nest  
Image: Ed Frazer, Brookfield ©