

## SHORT NOTE

### New Zealand dabchicks (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*) dive to gain access to nest under jetty at Lake Taupo, New Zealand

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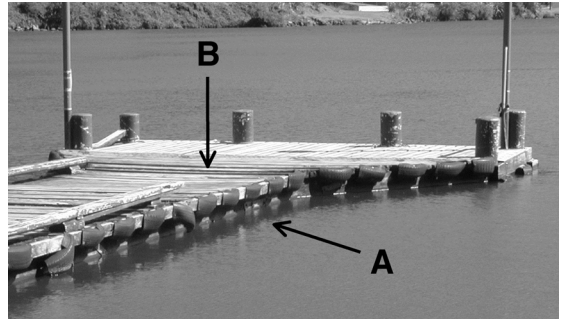
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Over 13-15 February 2004 we watched a pair of New Zealand dabchicks (*Poliiocephalus rufopectus*) nest building in Waihi Bay, near Tokaanu, on the south-east shore of Lake Taupo. The concealed nest was on a horizontal wooden support 18-20 cm beneath a wooden jetty, its top being about 5 cm above the water surface. The lake water level was high (Fig. 1) so the birds had to dive under the submerged edges of the jetty to access the nest. The waterlogged nest, constructed of aquatic plants, could be seen through cracks between timber planks on the top of the jetty. Both birds were actively nest building on 13 February, the nest platform being completed by 14 February. Thereafter the birds remained on or near the nest for much of the time, remaining out of sight under the jetty. Over the period of observation, the jetty had little human use, being mostly used as a resting site for local water birds, such as little shag (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and New Zealand scaup (*Aythya novaeseelandiae*). People walking down the jetty caused the dabchicks to move away from the nest area temporarily, but they returned within 10 minutes of the people departing. The dabchicks defended sites either side of the jetty near the nest, adopting the threat posture illustrated by Storer (1971) to chase off mallard and scaup, despite being smaller than these ducks.

The New Zealand dabchick usually nests amongst emergent vegetation at the margins of inland waters, or on a ledge at the water's edge. Lusk & Lusk (1981) describe a range of situations in which dabchick nests were found on Lake Rotoiti,



including on a concrete wharf pile just above water level, and attached to the stern of a boat moored in a boatshed. Nests have been recorded under overhanging banks, in small caves, and in old tyres used as boat fenders on jetties (Moon & Lockley 1982; Heather 1985; Marchant & Higgins 1990). The dabchicks' use of human built structures on water margins is, therefore, not unusual. The present record is of interest in that the birds had to approach the nest site by swimming underwater, resulting in a concealed and relatively secure nest site akin to an artificial cave. The site would also have some protection from wave action, as we observed on 15 February when a fresh inshore wind prevailed. We did not visit the site after that date so the fate of the nest is not known. An observation by Edgar (1962) near the shore of Lake Rotoiti involved similar behaviour, though no nest was reported: one of a pair of dabchicks emerged from a dive with weed pulled from the lake floor, then dived again to swim under a boathouse with the weed in its bill.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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