



The Little Grebe prefers calm and clean fresh water bodies with vegetation along the banks



The grebes run on water prior to taking off in the air



Little Grebe can swim rapidly if the need arises and leaves a trail on water surface

Food:



A sequence of photographs showing catching of fish by the parent, approaching the chick with food, feeding it, watching it eat the offered food and then going for the next catch. Feeding territories are ferociously guarded by the male and an intruder is seen to be attacked by the resident male (shown below)



Food items include aquatic insects, mollusks, crustaceans, amphibians, fish, planktons, aquatic vegetation and feathers. Feed by diving or on surface of water. Parents feed small fish to chicks and encourage them to dive for food.

Status: Common Resident, Local migrant.
Distribution: Entire India, SE Asia, Middle East, N. Africa and Madagascar.
Habit: Aquatic.

Habitat: Inland water bodies with low turbidity, reed beds or other peripheral vegetation, *Phragmites*, *saccharum*, *typha*, *hydrilla*, *spirogyra* are preferred. Avoid fast flowing rivers and sea. Use open areas for foraging and vegetation cover for nesting.

Key Features:

- Sexes alike.
- Pointed small bill.
- Iris red-orange to yellow with spots around pupil.
- Bill base, gape yellow-green.
- Dark grey crown.
- Chestnut cheeks and neck.
- Stubby or absent tail.
- Backwardly placed green-black legs.
- Tarsus laterally compressed, scutellated in front.
- Front toes laterally lobed, hind toe raised and vertically lobed.
- Broad and flat nails.
- 12 primary feathers, outer rudimentary.
- White patch on secondaries.
- Dusky brown flanks.
- White belly.



Dark crown and yellow iris



Lobed toes assist is swimming



Colour variations can be seen in adult plumage with the feathers on the back ranging for pale to dark brown

Behaviour:

Submerge underwater when disturbed. Congregates of few hundred dabchicks are seen on water bodies in late winter. Pairs perform vocal display associated with running, wing flapping, swimming and chasing one other on water. Run on water in a vertical posture with vibrating wings. Copulate on nest. Breeding coincides with rainfall. Local migration depends on the availability of water depending on the monsoon.

Two male Little Grebes in breeding plumage aggressively fighting for the territory. The inner wing pattern is seen.



Parent in breeding plumage with chicks. One chick is seen under the wing and one more is climbing on the back of the parent. Other two chicks are following.



Brood:

Usually 1- 6 chicks. If the second clutch is laid, male attends to the chicks of the first clutch while female incubates.

Chicks:

Downy. Black and white striped and spotted. Start diving from second day, but cannot hold breath under water for longer duration.



Parent is seen on the nest lined with green vegetation



A clutch of four oblong eggs



Chicks of up to 3 to 4 weeks age have striped plumage. This offers them excellent camouflage



65 days old chick



80 days old chick. There is a gradual change in plumage colour from gray to brown

Etymology:

Podiceps ruficollis: L. *podex*, *podicis*, the vent or anus. L. *pes*, the foot. The legs of grebe are placed to the rear of the body. *Ruficollis* L. *rufus*, red; Mod. L. *-collis*, necked. Hindi and Marathi names *Pandubi*, one diving in water and *Tibukli*, the little one.

Related Species: (Both the species are winter migrants)



Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*



Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*

Nest Approach:



The grebe emerges from beneath the water close to the nest and inspects it



The parent encircles the nest to inspect the nest integrity



Parent climbing the nest



After incubation the parent stealthily leaves the nest and submerges under water to emerge at some distance away from the nest

Little Grebe (Dabchick) *Podiceps ruficollis* Salvadori, 1884

Type Locality – Shoa, Africa.

Tibukli (Marathi); *Pandubi* (Hindi); *Mukkulippan* (Tamil).

- **Length:** 230 to 290 mm.
- **Wing:** 94 -109 mm.
- **Weight:** 150 to 200 g.
- **Breeding Season:** April to October in N, C India; December to February in S India. Second clutch is laid in the year of good rainfall
- **Sexual Maturity:** 1 year.
- **Clutch:** 3 - 6 eggs once or twice a year.
- **Eggs:** 36 x 25 mm. Long oval. Chalky white become brown stained with incubation due to soiling.
- **Incubation:** Both sexes. 19-20 days.
- **Life span:** At least 6 years.

- **Chief Editor:** Dr. Satish Pande.
- **Associate Editor:** Rakjumar Pawar
- **Photographs:** Rajkumar Pawar, Niranjan Sant (Cover), Kiran Ghadge, Dr. Satish Karmalkar, Shailesh Deshpande & Dr. Satish Pande
- **Design:** Kiran Velhankar, MediaNext Infoprocessors Pvt. Ltd.
- **Copyright and Published by:** Ela Foundation, C-9, Bhosale Park, Sahakarnagar-2, Pune 411009. July, 2014. An OENSL initiative. www.elafoundation.org.
- **References:** Ali Salim and S. Dillon Ripley (1969) Handbook of Birds of India and Pakistan, Oxford University Press, Bombay; vol 3: 1-325.
- **Recommended Citation:** Satish Pande and Rajkumar Pawar (2016). Little Grebe. *Ela File* 24: 1-6. Ela Foundation, Pune.

SPONSORED BY:



Forest Department
Maharashtra
PCCF (RE T), Pune



www.elafoundation.org

Little Grebe

- Order: Podicipediformes
- Family: Podicipedidae ● Status: Resident

ELA FOUNDATION



Ela Foundation
Conservation Through Education & Research



Forest Department
Maharashtra
Principle Chief
Conservator of Forests (RET), Pune

Ela File 24

Amazing Facts:



Floating nest is attached to vegetation for anchoring



Eggs are laid in the nest in the central depression



When the parent leaves the nest it covers the whitish eggs with vegetation to prevent detection by predators



If risk is perceived, the chicks up to 3 weeks of age lay still as if dead and float on water with legs stretched in a deceptive manner. They are easily mistaken for floating vegetation and ignored

Dive under water without leaving a ripple. Easily adapt to manmade water bodies. Parents cover the nest and conceal eggs with weeds before leaving it. Nest temperature is higher than lake water due to decomposition of organic nest material, which prevents egg chilling. Chicks ride on parents back or under wings or are towed by parents in water as they hold their flank feathers with bills.

Nest Site:

On any suitable shallow water body. The floating nest is anchored to a partially submerged thorny tree or other support close to the bank to prevent drifting.

Nest:

Both sexes build the circular, floating platform-pad from soggy aquatic weeds, sticks and rushes. A central depression is seen. Dabchicks often approach the nest swimming under water than over the surface.



The nest is often liberally covered with fresh algal matter and this prevents nest detection



The nest is often constructed in water near thorny shrubs bordering the banks where land predators cannot easily approach it

Parental Care:



Parent with four chicks. They remain with parents for a few months



Little grebe hiding near bank vegetation



Parents closely attend the chicks during the first three weeks

Threats: Flooding of water body may cause drowning of nest. Sudden decrease in water level can cause nest tilting and egg loss. Other threats are eutrophication, turbidity, habitat modification or loss, pollution, hunting and predation by raptors.

Legal Protection: Included in Schedule IV of Indian WildLife (Protection) Act, (1972).



Constructions near a water body can force the grebes to abandon the habitat



A partially damaged nest after a storm with two addled eggs that were abandoned by the parents

Dr. Satish Pande, Rajkumar Pawar, Prashant Deshpande, Niranjan Sant, Kiran Ghadge, Dr. Satish Karmalkar, Shailesh Deshpande did the field work for over 10 years. Thanks are due to Maful Hussain (IFS, PCCF-R,E & T) and Anurag Chaudhary (IFS, APCCF), T. N. Salunkhe (IFS, CCF-R), Nitin Kakodkar (IFS, CCF-E&T), Maharashtra Forest Department.