

QUACK CLUB

THE DAB chick

In this issue we are taking a look at the shy little Dab Chick.



DAB CHICK (weweia)

The dabchick, or weweia is a specialised waterbird native to New Zealand. They are a member of the grebe family. Grebes are small to medium-sized aquatic diving birds.

Dabchicks are often found in lakes, dams, ponds and even sewage oxidation ponds. They are currently extinct from the South Island but they can be found around the Central North Island. The last sightings of Dab Chicks on South Island lakes but was in 1941.

APPEARANCE

The Dabchick grows to around 29cm long, weighs 250g and has a relatively long neck. The Dabchick has mostly dark plumage with a line of distinctive fine, silvery feathers on it's head. The breast and fore neck have a chestnut tinge, and the underparts are dusky to silvery white. They have large, powerful lobed feet set far back on their body to propel and steer themselves in water.

Dabchicks are known for head-bobbing up and down, side to side, or back and forth, and this behaviour often tells them apart from scaup. They are noted for their ability to change buoyancy.

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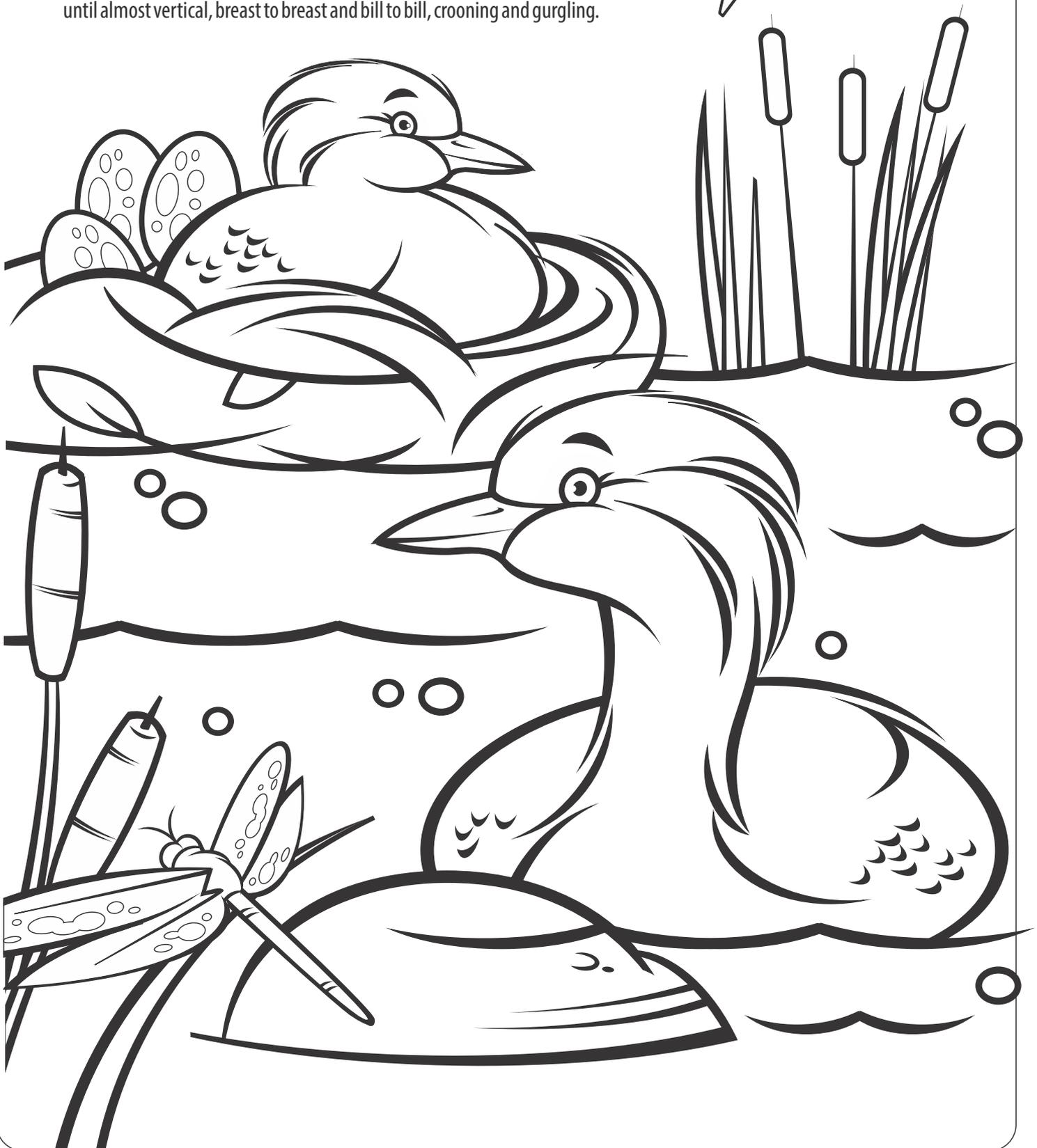
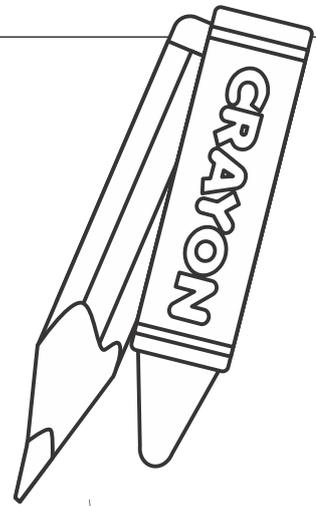
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colour me in!

Colour in all the Dab Chicks below and try to make the water look clean and inviting for all the wildlife.

In Dab Chicks courtship they float facing each other, fanning their wings and fluffing up their head crests and neck ruffs. At the height of the display they rear upwards until almost vertical, breast to breast and bill to bill, crooning and gurgling.

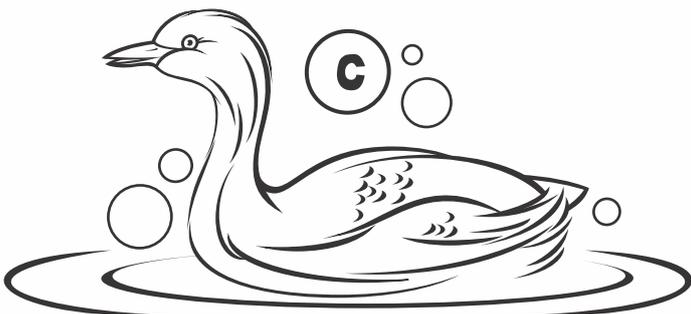
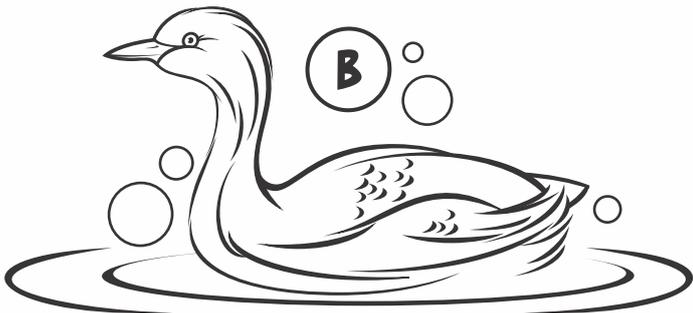
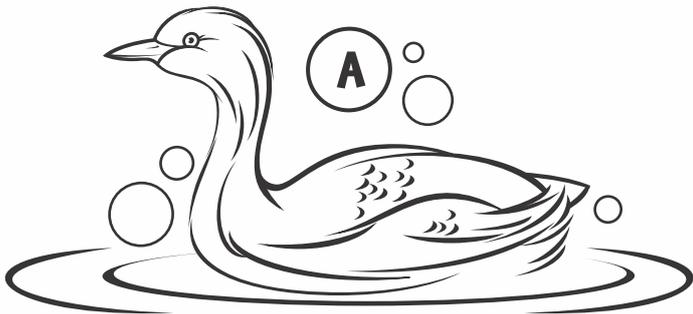


Maori and the Dab Chicks

The New Zealand dabchick is generally a shy and silent bird, except for an occasional wee-ee-ee call during breeding season. It is this call which inspired its Maori name Weweia. A Māori tradition recounts that kāmana (crested grebes) dive down to lay their eggs and raise their chicks on the bed of Rotopounamu, a green volcanic lake. New Zealand dabchicks lack the flamboyant crests and neck ruffs of crested grebes – hence the Māori expression 'he tangata weiweia' (a dabchick man), meaning a person of lowly standing.

ODD one out?

WHICH ONE IS THE ODD ONE OUT?



Conservation & Threats

The New Zealand dabchick is a threatened species and is listed as 'nationally vulnerable'. It has an estimated population of 1700 birds.

Some of the common threats to the New Zealand dabchick include dogs, stoats, rats and other swimming predators. Their nests are often swamped by even small changes in water levels such as in hydro lakes or by wake from boats.

Dab Chick Diet

Their diet consists mostly of aquatic insects and their larvae, as well as small mollusks such as freshwater snails. Occasionally bigger prey such as fish and freshwater crayfish are taken. Dabchicks dive for their food and can reach depths of around 4 m. They can hold their breath for around 40 seconds. They sometimes start their dive with a forward leap.

They can also feed on the surface, dipping their head underwater and sweeping it from side to side. They even sometimes snatch flying insects.

NEST sites in DANGER!

Starting in July, Dab chicks start building their nests in water-logged vegetation. Usually nests are anchored to water plants like raupō or sedges, or tree branches that trail into the water. Because the nest is attached to something it doesn't have much buoyancy, so dabchick nests are very easily swamped by even a small rise in water levels – including boat wash or by changing water levels on hydro lakes. As the nests are close to shore, the eggs are also vulnerable to predation by Norway rats that like to live near water and are good swimmers.

BIRD PRINT CODE

This bird has green feathers and has a name that actually means green. Using the code below can you decipher what it is?



A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
→	↓	↘	↓	↓	↓	↘	↑	∩	↑	↑	↑	←
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
↖	↘	∩	→	↓	↑	↖	↑	∩	←	←	∩	→

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PLUMAGE

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The word plumage traces back to the French word plume, meaning feather, and it's a way of referring to all the feathers that form the color and patterns of a particular bird. For example the dab chick has grey and dull plumage.

GUESS THE BIRD

Can you guess the native New Zealand Bird by just its feathers?



1

This tail belongs to a



2

This chest belongs to a



3

This wing belongs to a



4

This wing belongs to a

1. Fantail 2. Tui 3. Kea 4. Takahē

Email us on info@quackclub.co.nz for answers. Tell us which issue in your email. Plus there are will be loads more fun, facts and links to enjoy. See you there!