

GREBES

Order PODICIPEDIFORMES

THE grebes—with which are often included the *Colymbiformes*, or divers, which are northern birds, not entering the tropics—can be distinguished from most other aquatic birds by their extremely dense, thick, soft and silky plumage, and the very short tail, which is little more than vestigial. The tarsus is at most equal to and generally shorter than the middle toe and claw. Toes with wide lateral lobes, like that of a coot or finfoot. Bill somewhat variable, straight, pointed or curved downwards—short and slightly bent downwards in the only local species.

Grebes are highly aquatic birds, of greater powers of flight than would appear from their short and rounded wings, and excellent swimmers and divers. They are found mostly in fresh-water lakes and rivers which are well vegetated. About forty forms are known, occurring throughout the world, except on the islands of Oceania.

Only one species, *Podiceps fluviatilis philippensis*, the little grebe, a close relative of the English dabchick, is known to occur in Malaya. It is at present recorded with certainty within our limits only from the large reed-beds of the Talé Sap in the Siamese district of Patelung, near Singgora, but may possibly be met with in the swampy country on the east coast of Pahang and Johore.

It will be described in a later volume.

Order PROCELLARIIFORMES

Petrels, Shearwaters and Albatrosses

THIS order can at once be distinguished from all existing birds by the character of the nostrils, which terminate in tubes, parallel to the line of the beak, sometimes united, but generally double when viewed from in front. The tarsi are usually relatively short, the toes webbed, the hind toe always small and often absent. The tail is rather short, square, wedge-shaped or cuneate; wings in nearly all the forms long and narrow.

The size is varied; the smallest forms are about the size of a starling, while the largest albatross, though not very bulky in body, has a spread of wing exceeding that of any other bird. The order is purely pelagic in habits,

and extends over the whole globe. It reaches, however, its maximum development in the south temperate and sub-Antarctic zones, and its members are relatively scarce in the Equatorial tropics.

One egg is laid—or at most two—generally in burrows, on islands, or sometimes on the summits of mountains near the sea, and the young are helpless until nearly full grown. The colours are always white, black, grey or brown, or some combination of these tints.

About one hundred and fifty forms are known throughout the globe, but only one has been identified with certainty from Malayan seas. This is a small uniform sooty brown species, *Oceanodroma monorhis* (Swinh.), a bird of very wide distribution, ranging from Malaya to the coasts of China and Japan, and thence to the west coast of Mexico. Its habits are largely nocturnal, which accounts for its scarcity. Another small black species with a white rump has been observed in the Straits of Malacca on many occasions, but never obtained. This is probably *Oceanites oceanites*, Wilson's storm petrel, common in many parts of the Atlantic and Indian oceans.

Both these birds will be described in detail in a later volume.