

# POSTILLA

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# Postilla

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ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE HORNED COOT,  
*FULICA CORNUTA* BONAPARTE

S. DILLON RIPLEY

Subsequent to the publication of the notes on this curious species contained in *Postilla* No. 30, Feb. 28, 1957, new information has come to light which seems worth printing here. Again I am indebted for these added observations to Sr. William R. Millie of Vallenar, Chile, as well as to Sr. A. W. Johnson of Santiago, who have recently returned from a trip to the high altiplano of extreme northern Chile and western Bolivia.

Mr. Johnson and Mr. Millie found a group of twelve Horned Coots on an artificial lake called Tranque Caritaya, altitude 3600 metres, in the south of the Department of Arica, Chile. This extends the range of *Fulica cornuta* north more than 500 kilometres from the previously known range in Chile. Lake Caritaya is only 60 miles from Lake Cotacotani where *Fulica gigantea* has been observed (1951, Goodall, Johnson and Philippi, *Las Aves de Chile*, 2: 185-188), although it is 1200 metres lower in altitude.

At this lake Messrs. Johnson and Millie found three nests on February 9 and 10, 1957, of which one was occupied by a female brooding a clutch of eggs, about one-third advanced in incubation, and the others gave evidence of having been recently occupied. A point of great interest was that the nests were constructed entirely of vegetation, apparently *Myriophyllum*, *vide* Millie, in the usual coot fashion, but that the shape of these nests was similar to those made of stones far to the south,

being cone-shaped with the greater part under water apparently resting on the bottom, unlike the mat-shaped, largely floating nests of *Fulica gigantea* and the smaller species.

It seems possible to speculate, therefore, that the nests made of stones in the alpine xerophytic zone where *Fulica cornuta* has previously been observed, which have only a coating of *Myriophyllum* on the surface, have been developed as a unique nest building habit in direct response to the lack of vegetation, and that where vegetation is abundant this species will build a nest using traditional materials, although in a particular shape, peculiar to itself.

Three further points of interest emerge from these observations of extension of range of this species. The presence of several birds on Lake Caritaya implies at least that *Fulica cornuta* is more tolerant than its occurrence in the south would suggest. Perhaps the local abundance of food and nesting materials allows compression of territories in this situation. In addition it would appear that *Fulica gigantea* and *Fulica cornuta* are at least geographically sympatric, although the species may be altitudinally or ecologically isolated in this zone of presumed overlap.

Finally, the lateness of this nesting date in February might allow the Horned Coot to nest twice in the year. The Giant Coot nests in August, and again in November-December. *Fulica cornuta* has been known to breed only from late November to early January, now to February. Further investigation is needed to determine whether a double nesting cycle may occur in this species in the northern part of the range.