

Introducing whio

The whio / blue duck is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's ancient taonga (treasures) and is found nowhere else in the world. It is one of only four duck species that live year-round on clean, fast-flowing streams and rivers, and it's also an indicator species, meaning that where you find whio, you'll find clean waterways.



Call

Adult males make a distinctive "fee-oh, fee-oh" call, which gave the bird its name, while adult females make a rattly growling noise.



Eyes

Whio have very distinctive yellow eyes that face forward, just like a human's, so they can see what's happening ahead.



Bill

The bill of a whio is like no other. It has black, rubbery lips at the tip that work like bumper bars, protecting the bill as the bird scrapes over rocks searching for food. The bill also has filters like those of a baleen whale, which help it suck up aquatic invertebrates (insects and worms) from the water.



Camouflage

The blue-grey feathers of whio gave the bird the 'blue' in its English name, but those feathers also have a very important function – they help whio blend into their river environment and hide from predators.



Feet

Whio are nimble movers, with large, webbed feet that act like flippers in the water. Even newly hatched ducklings have large feet to help them paddle against the fast current. These unique feet can fold down like an umbrella to reduce drag when the bird is moving quickly downstream.



Size

An adult male weighs in at about 1,000–1,300 g (that's about the same weight as 2–3 blocks of butter), while the female is slightly lighter at 800–1,000 g.



Photo: Sabine Bernert

A year in the life of a whio

Dive into the white-water world of whio and learn what a typical year looks like for these iconic ducks.



August

After finding a piece of paradise, it's time to build a nest and breed



October

Excitement – the ducklings are hatching!



January

Teenagers fledge and leave the nest, while adults start to moult, making them vulnerable to predators



March

Join us in celebrating this incredible backcountry duck during Whio Awareness Week

April–July

Time for romance – whio start looking for a mate, find their match and settle down



September

Females sit on their eggs for around 35 days while their mate stands guard



November–December

The whio family hangs out for about 80 days until the youngsters start to find their wings and fledge



February

Time to release captive-bred fledglings into the wild

To find out more about whio, visit doc.govt.nz/whio or join the Whio Forever community @WhioForever  

