

## 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.

### 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



### 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

## Whio are under threat

With an estimated total population of less than 3,000 birds, the endangered whio needs our help to survive and thrive.

► **Predators:** Stoats and ferrets present the greatest danger to whio, as they attack females on the nest, steal eggs and take young ducklings from the river's edge. But weka, cats and dogs have also been known to eat whio eggs, as have falcons, hawks and other birds.

► **Weather:** Although whio like fast-flowing rivers, flooded waterways can destroy their nests and drown whio ducklings.

► **People:** The deforestation of land for farming and urban development, pollution, and river diversions have all affected the waterways whio call home.

► **Moult:** Whio moult between February and May, and this loss of plumage puts them in grave danger. Whio are unable to fly until their new feathers grow through, so they literally become 'sitting ducks' to predators.

# Whio / blue duck



Cover photo: Sabine Bernert

### Learn more

For further information on the whio / blue duck and how you can help:

- visit [doc.govt.nz/whioforever](https://doc.govt.nz/whioforever)
- join the Whio Forever community @WhioForever



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## You can help protect whio/blue ducks

- Give whio space – they may seem tame and unafraid, but you should watch them from a distance to keep them safe
- Keep waterways and their surrounding environments clean
- Be careful not to disturb whio families during the breeding season
- Volunteer with your local community trapping group
- Report any whio sightings to [iNaturalist.nz](https://iNaturalist.nz)
- Take your dog through an avian avoidance training programme. Learn more at [kiwiavoidancetraining.nz](https://kiwiavoidancetraining.nz)

## How well do you know whio?

1. True or false?  
Whio make a distinctive 'quacking' sound.
2. True or false?  
Whio are rarer than some species of kiwi.
3. What habitat do whio live in?
  - a) Fast-flowing rivers
  - b) Lakes and ponds
  - c) Marshes
4. What New Zealand bank note do whio feature on?
  - a) \$5
  - b) \$10
  - c) \$20
5. What does 'whio' mean in te reo Māori?

To find the answers, visit [doc.govt.nz/whioforever](https://doc.govt.nz/whioforever)

The whio/blue duck is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's ancient taonga (treasures). These rare birds have a host of amazing adaptations that have seen them survive in environments other ducks wouldn't dare dip their feet in – New Zealand's fast-flowing rivers.

**Calls**  
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 that help it suck up aquatic invertebrates (insects and worms) from the water.

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

**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.

