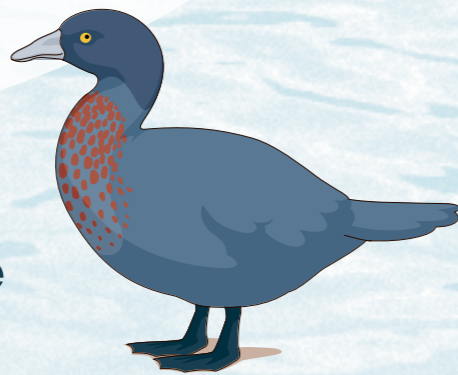


MEET THE WHIO

What's one of our rarest birds, has a very unusual bill and appears on the \$10 note?



It's the whio - a feisty, rapid-running, aquatic acrobat that's commonly known as the blue duck (*Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*) - and there are only around 2500 left in the wild.

This little bird is one of our national, ancient treasures; it has a host of amazing adaptations which have seen it survive in environments other ducks wouldn't shake a feather at - New Zealand's fast flowing rivers.

Once found throughout the country, whio are now mainly found in Te Urewera, the Central North Island, Fiordland, the West Coast and northern parts of the South Island. And, wherever you find whio, you know the river they're living on is clean as whio only live on healthy waterways.

WHAT'S UNIQUE ABOUT THE WHIO?



Camouflage

The whio's blue-grey feathers give them the 'blue' duck name, but they also have a very important function - camouflage. They help whio blend in to their river environments and hide from avian predators. They are nick-named 'ghost ducks' by Maori because they are often heard, but not seen.



Designer lips

The whio bill has been designed like no other. It has the black rubbery lip at the end that works like a bumper-bar, protecting it from wear as it bounces over rocks searching for food. It also has filters like those of a baleen whale enabling it to extract aquatic invertebrates from the water.



Navigation

Whio are nimble navigators with large webbed feet that act like flippers in the water. Even newly-hatched ducklings have the large feet for paddling against the fast current; they fold back like an umbrella to reduce drag when moving quickly downstream.



Eyes Forward

The whio have very distinctive yellow eyes that are forward-facing like humans so they can see what's happening ahead.



Size

Adult males weigh in at about 1000-1300 grams - that's about two packs of butter - with the females slightly lighter at 800-1000 grams.



Call & character

Adult males make a distinctive 'fee-o, fee-o' call that gives the bird their name. Female whio make a rattly growling noise.

When walking in certain areas, you might be lucky enough to encounter a whio, especially in the early morning or late evening when they are most active.

