

Blue Duck



COMMON NAME: **BLUE DUCK** – Gmelin, 1789

LATIN NAME: *Hymenolaimus malacorhynchos*

LATIN MEANING: Gr. *hymen*, *humenos*, a skin or membrane; *laimos*, the throat; ref. the membranous upper chin of the Blue Duck. *Malacorhynchos*, Gr. *malakos*, soft; *rhunkhos*, the bill; ref. soft flaps on upper mandible.

MAORI NAME: Whio

CLASS: Aves

ORDER: Apterygiformes

FAMILY: Apterygidae

GENUS: *Hymenolaimus*

SPECIES/SUB SPECIES: *Malacorhynchos*

DESCRIPTION:

A large duck about 53 cm in size. Dove grey colouring with a bluish sheen, heavily spotted red/brown on the breast, pinkish/white bill with a black tip, dark brown feet. Female has reduced red/brown spotting on the breast and spots are completely absent in juveniles.

HABITAT / DISTRIBUTION:

Whio are river dwelling and sometimes referred to as a torrent duck. They frequent the headwater catchments of rivers in both the North and South Islands.

BREEDING:

Females are able to start breeding at 12 months of age, while most males first breed in their second year. The breeding season is from August–November with clutches of 4–9 white eggs. Only the female incubates throughout the 35 day incubation period. Ducklings are fledged at around 70–82 days.

SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR:

Adult Whio are both sedentary and territorial with pair bonds maintained throughout the year and over several years.

DIET:

The main food for Whio is freshwater invertebrates, although freshwater snails and chironomid larvae are also eaten. Reports also indicate that birds have been seen eating fruits of stream-side plants in the South Island.

PRINCIPAL THREATS:

- Habitat loss
- Disturbance including white water recreational activities
- Hunting dogs & shooting
- Predation of nests by rats (eggs), stoats (adults, ducklings, eggs) ferrets, feral cats and dogs (adults) gulls, hawks, eels and shags (ducklings) and falcon (adults and ducklings)
- Introduced trout competing with Whio for freshwater invertebrates.

CONSERVATION STATUS:

Vulnerable (IUCN 1994)

Nationally endangered (DoC ranking 2002).



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