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Takahē

The flightless takahē is a unique bird, a conservation icon and a survivor.

Population: 418 as of October 2019

New Zealand status: Endemic

Conservation status: Threatened—Nationally Vulnerable

Found in: Native grasslands of Murchison Mountains, Fiordland and Goulard Downs, Kahurangi National Park

Threats: Predation, competition for food

Sound recordings:

[Takahē song \(MP3, 622K\)](#)

00:38 – Takahē song.

[Takahē song \(MP3, 611K\)](#)

00:52 – Takahē song.

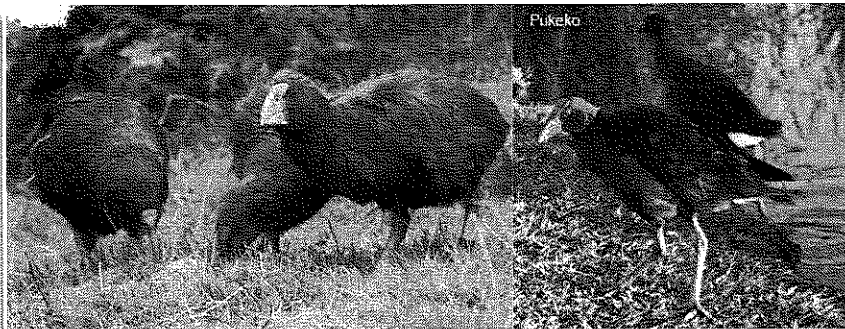
Species information: [Takahē on NZ Birds Online](#)

The flightless takahē (South Island takahē; *Porphyrio hochstetteri*), is the world's largest living rail (a family of small-medium sized ground-dwelling birds with short wings, large feet and long toes). The North Island takahē (moho; *P. mantelli*) is unfortunately extinct.

Takahē have special cultural, spiritual and traditional significance to Ngāi Tahu, the iwi (Māori tribe) of most of New Zealand's South Island. Ngāi Tahu value takahē as a taonga (treasure) and they continue to act as kaitiaki (guardians) of the takahē by working with DOC to protect this precious species.

Are they just fat pūkeko?

No! Although they look similar to their distant relative the pūkeko/purple swamp hen (that are common and can fly), takahē are much larger and more brightly coloured. Takahē weigh between 2.3 – 3 kg.



Takahē are larger with stout legs and more colours; pūkeko are blue with a black back
Image: [Shellie Evans](#) ©

Takahē have stout red legs and a large, strong red beak. Their feathers range from a dark royal blue head, neck and breast, to peacock blue shoulders, through to shades of iridescent turquoise and olive green on their wings and back. They have wings, but only use them for display during courtship or as a show of aggression.

Takahē only breed once a year, raising 1–2 chicks. Pairs will fiercely defend their territories. Families need a lot of space, with territories ranging between 4–40 ha, depending on the availability and quality of their food.

Takahē live for 16–18 years in the wild and 20–22 years at sanctuary sites.

In the wild, takahē inhabit native grasslands. They eat mostly the starchy leaf bases of tussock and sedge species, and also tussock seeds when available. If snow cover is heavy, they will move to the forest and feed mainly on underground rhizomes of the summer green fern.



Takahē may retreat to forest for shelter when snow is thick
Image: [Servane Kiss](#) ©

Mountains.

Fight for survival

Takahē once roamed across the South Island, but pressures from hunting, introduced predators, habitat destruction and competition for food led to their decline.

Presumed extinct for nearly 50 years, the takahē was famously rediscovered in 1948. Geoffrey Orbell, a physician from Invercargill and his party, discovered the last remaining wild population of the bird high in the tussock grasslands of the remote Murchison Mountains, above Lake Te Anau, Fiordland.

Takahē conservation

Threats

Deer love to browse on the same tussock species as takahē do. Unfortunately, this affects tussock growth and can impact on takahē food and habitat.

Stoats are predators of takahē. In 2007, there was a stoat plague that halved the takahē population in the Murchison



Takahē have 1 or 2 chicks a year
Image: [DOC](#)