**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 Gouland Downs, Kahurangi National Park

**Threats:** Predation, competition for food

**Sound recordings:**
- Takahē song (MP3, 622K)
  - 00:38 – Takahē song.
- Takahē song (MP3, 511K)
  - 00:52 – Takahē song.

**Species Information:** [Takahē on NZ Birds Online](https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/takahē/)

The flightless 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 (Maori 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: Takahē are larger with stout legs and more colours; pūkeko are blue with a black back](https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/takahē/)

*Image: Sheila 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 indescent 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 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: Takahē have 1 or 2 chicks a year](https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/takahē/)

*Image: DOC*

**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.

For many years, takahē were considered extinct. However, in 1982, three takahē were discovered living in the Murchison Mountains. Since then, the takahē population has been growing steadily. Today, there are over 418 takahē, with a goal of reaching 2000 by 2051.

For more information, see [DOC, n.d.](https://www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-animals/birds/birds-a-z/takahē/)