

CHAMBERS, S. 2009.

Birds of New Zealand - Locality Guide. 3rd edn.

Arun Books, Orewa, New Zealand.

Takahe: pp 141-143.



TAKAHE.

Family Rallidae

Species *Porphyrio mantelli*

Common names Takahe, Notornis (from *Notornis mantelli*)

Status Endemic

Abundance Rare

Size 630 mm (cf sparrow 145 mm, Pukeko 510 mm)

Habitat Lives in the high tussock-lands of the South Island where it feeds on tussock shoots, fern roots and alpine grasses. Sub-fossil bone deposits linked it in the past to a wide range of habitat from forests to grasslands at lower altitudes.

New Zealand range Once widely spread over both the North and South Islands. Today it is naturally confined to the Murchison Mountains in the South Island only. Captive reared birds have now been released on Tiri Tiri Matangi Island, Maungatautari Ecological Reserve, Kapiti Island, Mana Island (Wellington) and

Maud Island (Marlborough Sounds) where they are now breeding successfully if slowly.

Discussion The Takahe was thought to be extinct but was rediscovered in the Murchison Mountains above the shores of Lake Te Anau in 1948 by Dr G B Orbell.

Ancestry It is an ancient New Zealand bird with an ancestry linked to the Purple Gallinule similar to the common Pukeko. In ancient, predator-free New Zealand, this ancestor diverged becoming flightless, slow moving, large in size and slow breeding. As such it succumbed to predators and the ravages of a changed landscape after settlement by Europeans (Fleming 1982).

Description

Head Indigo-blue. **Upperparts** Olive-green. **Wings** Olive-green. **Underparts** Indigo-blue. **Undertail** White. **Bill and frontal shield** Red. **Legs** Red.

Conspicuous features

- Similar to a Pukeko but larger in size.
- Heavy red bill.

Conspicuous characteristics

- Birds are slow moving when feeding.
- Has a cumbersome gait.

Where to find – North Island

North Auckland – Tiri Tiri Matangi Island (no permit required) is the easiest place to see this bird in the wild in New Zealand. The fact that ferries run to the island between 4 and 7 times a week mean that chances of seeing this bird are very good even if the weather is poor. Pairs and family parties of birds are now widely spread around the island in territories. This gives the bird-watcher the opportunity of viewing the birds in a natural state. However, some birds are always present around the visitors' centre and this allows a view if they are missed in the wild. P. 292.

South Waikato – Maungatautari Ecological Reserve. P. 311.

Wellington – Kapiti Island (permit required). P. 337.

Where to find – South Island

Marlborough – Maud Island (permit required). P. 343.

Murchison Mountains – A permit is required from the Department of Conservation at Te Anau to visit these mountains. P. 369.

Captive Takahe –

- Mount Bruce National Wildlife Centre near Eketahuna. P. 333.
- Te Anau Wildlife Centre near Te Anau. P. 369.