



A pair of whio rest beside the Oroua River in the Ruahine Ranges.

Protecting Ruahines' river-loving whio

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Whio, the blue duck, is endangered with only 3000 remaining in the wild. This unique bird lives in clean, fast flowing mountain rivers. An indicator species for a clean waterway, whio are determinedly territorial birds that mate for life.

A small population survive in the Ruahine Forest Park where dedicated volunteers are working to increase their numbers.

Stoats are the main predator, particularly during the August to December breeding season, when eggs, chicks and nesting females are easy prey. Rats will also take eggs and chicks from nests. Trapping is an effective tool for controlling both pests.



There are six groups involved in Ruahine stoat trapping projects, and the Ruahine Whio Protection Trust was formed early last year to establish a fund for future conservation work.

Trap setting and checking is mostly done by volunteers, and checking traps in spring with snow melt and high river levels can be a challenge. Last year, wind conditions made access to the Pohangina river via the tops difficult.

In October, the Trust provided funding for a

helicopter to carry 100 gas canisters for the self-setting traps into mid-Pohangina hut.

Volunteers report seeing more whio. Lisa Whittle, checking traps recently in the northern Ruahines, was rewarded with a lovely sight.

"One pair [of whio] came out just on dusk with one very small duckling. It had extremely attentive parents! We wouldn't have seen them if we hadn't camped," Lisa reports.

Earlier last year, regular volunteers Anthony Behrens and Fiona Burleigh raised funds for the trust by walking the length of the South Island Te Araroa Trail over three months.

Next step for the Trust is website development and establishing Friends of the Whio.