It's not easy for our whio

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March is Whio Awareness Month. The unique whio or native blue duck is featured on a $10 note. Found only in New Zealand, whio are endangered, with fewer than 3000 ducks left.

Earlier in the month environmental groups, Department of Conservation rangers, a duck-sniffing dog and Scouts were out in force in Palmerston North's Esplanade to spread the word about whio for Whio Awareness Month.

Attendees had the opportunity to meet Fern the conservation dog and her ranger, to talk with the Ruahine Whio Protectors, and find out about Wildbase Recovery as well as build traps with the Milson Scouts.

Whio live in fast flowing, clean rivers with a good supply of underwater insects. This makes them important indicators of river health as they can only exist where there are high quality, healthy waterways, such as those rivers in their Ruahine Ranges habitat.

It's not easy being a whio. The aquatic birds are easy prey for predators such as stoats, ferrets and cats, especially during nesting, and need help.

In Ruahine Forest Park volunteers have set out kilometres of traps to reduce the predators that threaten whio in our rivers. The Ruahine Whio Protectors are made up of various groups of dedicated volunteers who maintain trapping projects across much of the Ruahine Ranges.

A variety of traps are used, including standard traps that need to be checked on a monthly basis. It's an occupation that requires a high level of fitness and tramping experience.

Genesis Energy has a long association with whio through the Whio Forever programme, a partnership with the Department of Conservation that aims to secure the future of whio in the wild and ensure New Zealanders understand the value of whio in our rivers.

The Ruahine Whio Protection Trust is a charitable trust that exists to raise funds to support this work, and to outline how the public can help with this important preservation work.

A whio or blue duck perches on a rock in the Mangatepopo River, Ruahine Forest Park. PHOTO: DOC