

Whio Forever

Annual Report July 2023 – June 2024



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



Whio. Photo: Sabine Bernert

A vulnerable taonga species

Introducing whio

Whio/blue ducks are one of Aotearoa New Zealand’s ancient taonga (treasures) that are found nowhere else in the world. Whio are one of only four duck species that live all year round on clean, fast-flowing streams and rivers. They are an indicator species, which means where you find whio, you’ll find clean waterways.

Whio under threat

Predators

Predators such as stoats, ferrets, and cats are great threats to whio, especially when nesting and during the late summer moult period when they can’t fly and are even more vulnerable to being attacked.

Weather

Climate-related events, such as flooding, have an impact on whio habitats and hinder predator trapping and whio monitoring efforts. With an estimated total population of 3,000, the species faces a very real risk of becoming extinct.



Whio. Photo: Sabine Bernert

Partnering to protect nature so whio thrive

In 2011, the Department of Conservation (DOC) and Genesis Energy established the Whio Forever Recovery Programme to enhance the survival of whio nationwide. Through the partnership, the programme has established eight security sites and supported several recovery sites nationwide.

The partnership involves managing and maintaining traps along 709 km of streams across 8 sites. This crucial work is carried out by DOC rangers, private and public organisations, and a number of local community partners. These groups clear and rebait traps, monitor the progress of the whio in the area, and carry out annual surveys that help keep track of whio numbers.

Security sites

These are high-priority areas that are intensively managed to protect a representative population of whio. At each of the eight sites, the goal is to have at least 50 pairs of whio.



Photos clockwise from top left: Norbert Rupp, Sarah Wills, Rebecca Davies, Herb Christophers, Jonathan Astin.

National results

Extending our partnership for 3 more years

Genesis has partnered with DOC on Whio Forever since 2011 and signed a 3-year extension to the partnership in FY24. The funding covers support for predator trapping at eight security sites across the motu.

It has been sobering to see another decline in the number of whio breeding pairs at security sites this year. Since FY23, pair numbers have fallen by 20 to 567. Breeding success may be limited by a number of factors outside the control of those tasked with whio protection. For example, weather events such as flooding can force whio to relocate out of main streams, impede access for regular trapping, and also inhibit monitoring efforts. In some locations it appears whio numbers may not be responding the way they used to, despite predator control effort remaining the same.

In light of these challenges, the Whio Recovery Group is planning a deep dive into the drivers for decline in specific areas; addressing these will ensure Whio Forever has the best tools to help whio thrive.

567 PROTECTED BREEDING PAIRS

.....

1,632 km OF RIVER PROTECTED IN 2024

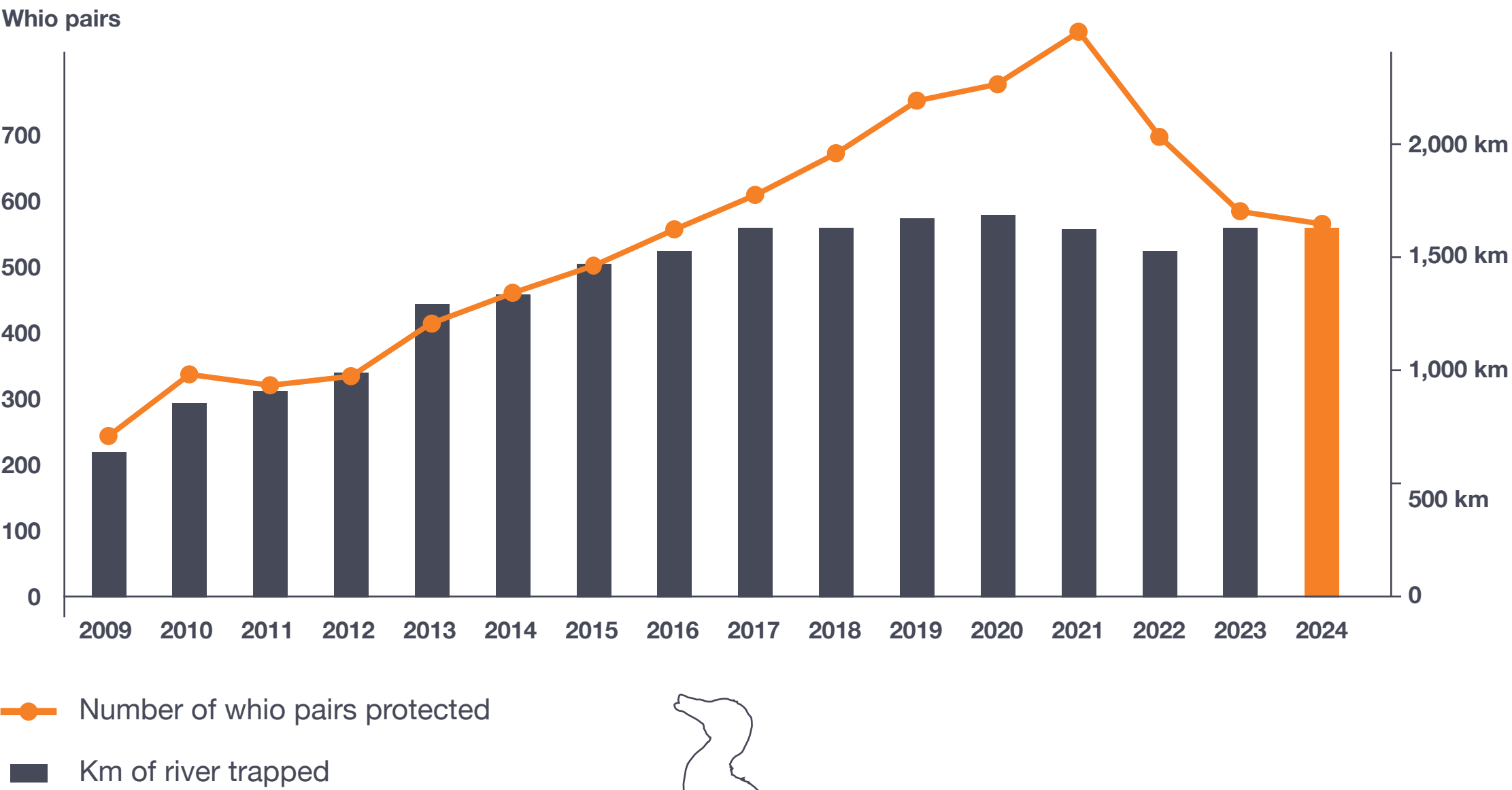


Whio. Photo: Luke Easton

Whirinaki Security Site visit

During Whio Awareness month in March 2024 members of the Whio Forever committee were hosted by Ngāti Whare at DOC’s Whirinaki security site inland from Rotorua. The Whirinaki Te Pua-a-Tāne Conservation Park contains one of the world’s last stands of prehistoric rainforest, and its rivers are ideal environments for whio.

Iwi representatives shared the history of their land and efforts to enhance its biodiversity, including predator control to protect whio. DOC ranger Sarah Wills explained that predator work has seen whio numbers increase from 58 pairs in 2016 to 77 pairs at the last full census in 2021. The visit was valuable to see the work being done on the ground by iwi, DOC, volunteers and community groups at Whirinaki, and around the country.



Raising awareness and engagement

‘Share the whio feels’ campaign

Our main campaign ‘Share the whio feels’ ran for one week from 18 – 24 March 2024.

The goal was to reach individuals who are actively engaged with nature and have an awareness of whio.

The aim was to deepen their connection with whio by getting them engaging with the Whio Forever social media content and community. We also wanted to raise awareness of the work of the partnership – the Whio Forever programme.

- ▶ Engagement included a huge growth in followers on the Whio Forever social channels (one of our key measures of success), lots of positive sentiment and over 200 shares of the campaign content.
- ▶ Awareness of the Whio Forever partnership also peaked in June at 13%, an increase from 12% the year before.

Genesis Energy paid ads

581,420 IMPRESSIONS

532,207 PEOPLE REACHED

DOC channels

40,800 PEOPLE REACHED THROUGH EMAIL NEWSLETTER

88,800 PEOPLE REACHED ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Whio Forever social channels

608 NEW FOLLOWERS ON FACEBOOK

364 NEW FOLLOWERS ON INSTAGRAM

526,022 PEOPLE REACHED

Online engagement July 2023 – June 2024

The Whio Forever channels have continued to show consistent growth. We offer followers frequent updates and information about whio through our social channels, to strengthen the audience’s connection to whio and the environment.

We saw:

 3,100 new followers.

 1,440 new followers.

There were 173 whio-related stories in the media, a 6% increase on the previous year.

Whio. Photo: Bubs Smith



Looking ahead

Partnership objectives

The Whio Forever partnership's primary objectives are:

- ▶ to fully protect whio at security sites; and
- ▶ to inspire New Zealanders to understand, engage in and participate in whio protection through a marketing, communications and advocacy programme.

Other objectives that will be achieved through the partnership delivery include:

- ▶ contributing to the delivery of monitoring, surveying, practitioner's workshops and best practice tools;
- ▶ contributing to securing whio at priority recovery sites;
- ▶ working alongside the Whio Recovery Group and others to leverage opportunities through the whio breed-for-release programme, DOC's National Predator Control Programme, Predator Free 2050 and other initiatives.

Long-term strategy

To build resilience to climate change and adapt to increasing impacts, the Department of Conservation is implementing a *Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan* as a pathway for preparing for current and future climate changes:

- ▶ The plan includes actions to identify climate change vulnerabilities and risks so that they can be proactively managed, and actions to embed climate adaptation into DOC business systems and practices.
- ▶ It will help us to prioritise climate change adaptation, management, and research actions so our efforts are focused on the species in the most critical need.

This will result in more efficient use of the resources we have for protecting species and help ensure the actions we take today build resilience for the future.



Whio. Photo: Sebastian Doak



Department of
Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai

