

10 | Mute Swan

Cygnus olor



orange bill

The Mute Swan was introduced to New Zealand between 1866 and 1871, with releases in Canterbury, Otago and Auckland. Small, wild populations now occur in Canterbury and Hawke's Bay. The birds at Virginia Lake are semi-feral, originating from captive birds. Males are bigger than females and have a larger knob above the bill. Despite its name, it is not entirely mute but makes a hoarse, muffled trumpet call when defending a territory. It also hisses when alarmed.

11 | Pūkeko

Porphyrio melanotus

red bill
and shield



Known in Australia as the Purple Swamphen, Pūkeko have reached many islands in the southwest Pacific. Although their flight seems lumbering, they are strong fliers. Pūkeko have a complex social life. Their mating system can involve any combination of one or more breeding females and males, with young from earlier broods helping to rear the chicks. Pūkeko are largely vegetarian, but will take animals such as insects, earthworms and even young birds, if they can.



flicks white
undertail

12 | Kawau / Shags

Microcarbo and Phalacrocorax species



Little
black
shag
long
fine
bill

short
bill

Black
shag
largest
of the
shags

Three species of shags occur at Rotokawau Virginia Lake, two of which – the Little Shag and the Little Black Shag—breed here in trees along the water's edge. The third species, the Black Shag, breeds on farm dams and along rivers, only coming to the lake to rest and fish. All three species eat fish but the little shag also feeds on aquatic insects. The Māori name for the lake, Rotokawau, reflects these species' presence.

As you walk around the lake you will be following a discovery trail of 12 stations, each illustrating a different species of waterbird you might see there.

Rotokawau Virginia Lake supports a surprising diversity of species, both native and introduced. Their numbers fluctuate seasonally, generally being highest in winter and lowest in summer, when many birds are away breeding. Enjoy the sights and sounds!



Little shag



WHANGANUI
DISTRICT COUNCIL
Te Kaunihera a Rohe o Whanganui

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MEET
THE
BIRDS
TRAIL

Rotokawau Virginia Lake Whanganui

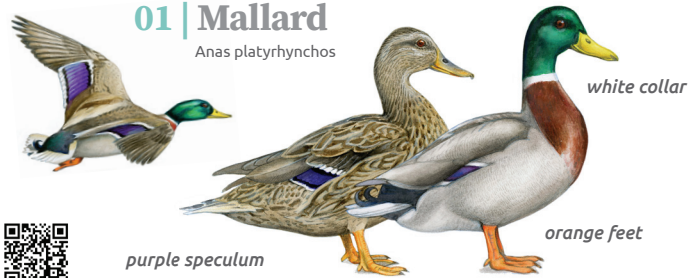


Companion guide
for the 30-min stroll
around the lake, with
useful identification
tips and information
about waterbirds you
might meet along
the way.



01 | Mallard

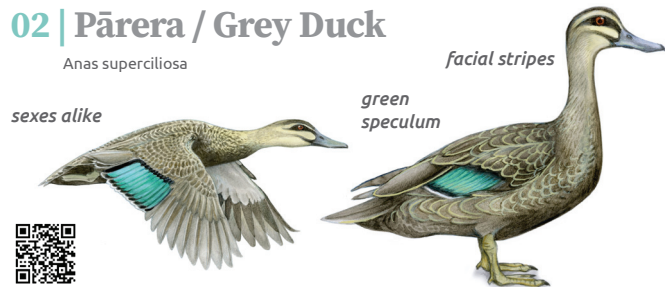
Anas platyrhynchos



Mallard were introduced to New Zealand from 1870 onwards, originally from English stock but later reinforced by bringing in birds and eggs from the USA. It is now the commonest duck in New Zealand, and the mainstay of waterfowl hunting. It hybridises readily with the New Zealand Grey Duck, threatening the latter's genetic uniqueness. Mallard are mainly herbivorous, eating whatever plant matter is available, but they will eat insect larvae and other invertebrates when available.

02 | Pārerā / Grey Duck

Anas superciliosa



Widespread interbreeding with Mallard means that most Grey Duck seen today are probably hybrids, giving the species a 'nationally critical' conservation status. Pure-bred Grey Duck are monomorphic (sexes alike) with a bright cream face split with two black stripes, as shown here. The speculum, an iridescent patch in the inner wing, is green (purple in Mallard and hybrids). Bill and leg colours are olive grey (orange to yellowish in Mallard). Grey Duck feed by upending in shallow water and foraging for seeds and insect larvae on the bottom.

03 | Pāpango / New Zealand Scaup

Aythya novaseelandiae



This highly social species occurs year-round at Rotokawau Virginia Lake. Males are distinguishable from females by their iridescent black plumage and golden eye. Females are chocolate brown, often with a white patch behind their bill. Their irises are brown. Scaup feed mostly underwater, diving for snails and the larvae of aquatic insects living in lake sediments. They can stay underwater for almost a minute, often reappearing some distance away.

04 | Tētē moroiti / Grey Teal

Anas gracilis



Grey Teal is a self-introduced species from Australia, where it is nomadic. It has been resident in New Zealand for well over 150 years, and probably much longer. Its small size, grey-brown plumage, lack of facial markings, neat round head, and broad white stripe on its upper wing, are its main distinguishing features. Seen close, the eye is red. Like most dabbling ducks, it feeds on small aquatic insects, snails and the seeds of wetland plants.

05 | Eurasian Coot

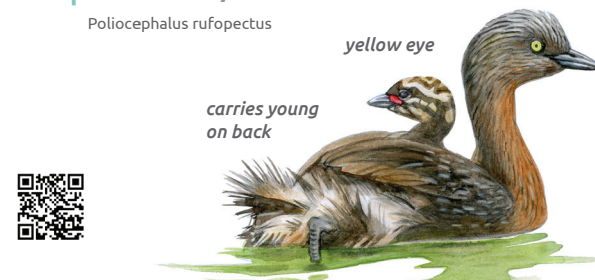
Fulica atra



The coot is a self-introduced species from Australia. First recorded breeding in Otago in 1958, it is now common and widespread throughout the country except Northland. It was first noted in Whanganui in 1967. They feed mainly on algae, grass, leaves, shoots, fruit, and seeds, but also occasionally on aquatic insects and eggs. Notice their unusual lobed toes, which are quite unlike the webbed feet of most waterbirds, including ducks.

06 | Weweia / New Zealand Dabchick

Poliocephalus rufopectus



The New Zealand Dabchick is found in the North Island and the extreme north of the South Island, inhabiting freshwater ponds and lakes. It dives often, staying underwater for up to half a minute, while it searches for aquatic insects and small fish, its main prey. Adults carry their young on their backs. Dabchicks are dependant on healthy wetlands, and are vulnerable to disturbance, mainly from motor-boats and jet skis.

07 | Kuruwhegi / Australian Shoveler

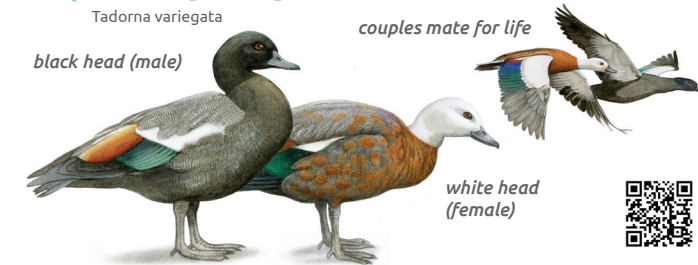
Anas rhynchos



This duck is distinguished by its large bill, broader towards the tip than at the base. This is used to filter food items such as small snails, insects, plankton and the floating seeds of aquatic plants from the water surface. It is strongly dimorphic, the female differing from the male (illustrated here) by being mottled brown, camouflaging her when she is nesting. In early spring, males display to females by making short, noisy, arching 'jump flights'.

08 | Pūtangitangi / Paradise Shelduck

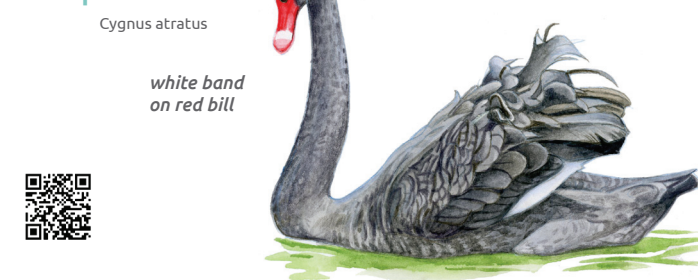
Tadorna variegata



These noisy, colourful birds are found only in New Zealand. Being primarily grazers, shelduck have benefitted from the expansion of planted pastures, especially where under-sown with clover. Their numbers have increased substantially countrywide, despite being hunted legally, one of the few native New Zealand species for which this is allowed. Females have a high-pitched reedy call, mainly given in flight. Males make a goose-like honk.

09 | Kakianau / Black Swan

Cygnus atratus



Fossil evidence shows that Black Swans were present in New Zealand when it was first settled, but the species became extinct sometime after. It re-established itself through a combination of self-introduction and the release of birds from Australia in the mid-1860s. It is now abundant and widespread throughout New Zealand. Black Swans are wholly herbivorous, feeding mainly on submerged aquatic plants, but when water levels are too high, they will graze on land.