

Wetland birds



Linnaeus says...

One swamphen is not like the other

New Zealand's iconic swamphen or pūkeko (*Porphyrio porphyrio* sub-species *melanotus*) is one of at least six different sub-species around the world. Despite being the same species, these birds look quite different depending on where in the world they come from.



Digging deeper...

Life in an estuary is tough. Estuaries form where a river meets the tide of an ocean or sea. The fresh water of the river mixes with varying amounts of seawater, depending on the tide. This means the salinity (saltiness) of the water is constantly changing. Very few species are capable of putting up with this. For this reason the number of species in an estuary is low, but those that are there thrive.

Prior to European settlement the area now known as the Taieri Plains was a vast, tidal swamp, teeming with birdlife. Much of it was drained to make way for agricultural land, but luckily some parts in the Waihola-Waipori area have been preserved and protected for us all to enjoy.

This area is a magnet for many of our wetland birds. A great place to visit is the Sinclair Wetlands, a reserve donated to the wetlands scheme by Horace Sinclair in 1984. Walking tracks through this 300 hectare reserve give you the opportunity to see and feed many common wetland birds such as pūkeko, scaups, swans, ducks and the patient or lucky might even spot some of the fernbirds, bitterns, White herons or spoonbills that reside or visit here.

A number of significant estuaries line the Otago coast, including the Catlins Lake and Waikawa Harbour in the Catlins, Otago Harbour and Blueskin Bay, north of Dunedin. Estuaries are the feeding grounds for many migratory bird species. Spend some time at any of them and you'll spot many different birds including oystercatchers, herons, stilts, godwits and possibly Royal spoonbills.

Oystercatchers and stilts, including New Zealand's Black stilt and the self-introduced Pied stilt, head inland to the South Island's braided rivers for breeding. Eastern bar-tailed godwits are commonly found here from October to March before they set off for a true marathon journey to their breeding colonies in northeast Siberia and northwest America.



A fernbird – one of the harder native birds to spot



Two Pied stilts wading through the shallows

