



Matuku-hūrepo

MASTERS OF THE MARSHLAND

What's their superpower?

Matuku-hūrepo are masters of hide and seek. Using their 'freeze' stance and streaky brown and white feather pattern, they blend into their surroundings becoming nearly invisible. They sometimes even sway, mimicking the movement of reeds, to avoid predators and ambush prey.

Why do we need them?

These wetland warriors help keep fish, eel and insect numbers in check. Plus, as they move through water, they stir up nutrients that help aquatic plants grow. Because they need a healthy, diverse habitat and plenty of food, they're also indicators of wetland health - a high number of matuku-hūrepo is a sign of a thriving wetland system.

Fascinating facts

Culturally connected: Matuku-hūrepo are woven into Māori legends and stories, appearing in early artworks. Many place names across Aotearoa reference them, reflecting their cultural importance.

Lone rangers: Unlike many other birds that flock together, matuku-hūrepo prefer solitude, spending their lives hidden in dense wetland vegetation – that's why they're rarely seen.

Bounce-back beaks: Their beaks are made of keratin (the same

protein found in hair, skin and nails), which means they'll usually recover quickly from minor damages.

Hollow-boned hunters: Their bones contain air sacs that make them lighter, helping them soar, flap and stay airborne.

Boomers of the bird world: To attract mates and keep rivals at bay, males unleash powerful 'booms' during breeding season, heard up to 2km away. You might hear them at dawn and dusk.

Habitat: Dense, shallow wetlands across NZ and Australia.

Nesting season: August to December (peaking in November)

Diet: Fish, eels, insects, frogs and freshwater crustaceans.

Size: Up to 51cm and around 650g.

Did you know?

Like almost all other birds, matuku-hūrepo have sharper-than-human eyesight. They can see the same range of colours as us, but also detect ultraviolet light, which reveals details and colours invisible to us.



IMAGE CREDITS: IMOGEN WARREN

Conservation corner

Sadly, matuku-hūrepo have lost 90% of their habitat and the rest is degraded and under threat. As a result, they're critically endangered and their numbers are plummeting. Aside from habitat destruction, invasive predators like cats are a threat to adults, and stoats, ferrets and weasels will prey on chicks and eggs.

How you can help

- ✓ Get involved in wetland restoration projects that aim to restore and protect matuku-hūrepo habitats.
- ✓ Plant native vegetation like rāupo and reeds (juncus species), and create buffer zones around edges of ponds, wetlands and streams to restore their natural habitat.
- ✓ Control pests by setting rat and stoat traps in your area.



Get involved Connect with local groups and help protect biodiversity in your area
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