

BLUE DUCK – *Symbol of wild*



Forest and Bird's South Island Field Officer Mike Harding, has taken an active interest in blue duck – carrying out his own research at Arthur's Pass. Here he explains what is special about the blue duck, or whio, and describes the current threats facing the species.

FOR ANYONE who has tramped through the mountains of New Zealand, the whistle of the blue duck is one of the most characteristic sounds of the wilderness. The spectacle of a pair of blue ducks bobbing downstream with their fluffy chicks, expertly negotiating rapids and white water, is unique to unmodified mountain rivers. Even the most hardened back country traveller treasures the memory of these tame and confiding birds. Yet, despite its legal protection, the future

of the blue duck is by no means secure.

Blue ducks are river specialists, a distinction they share with few other species of duck world-wide, notably the African black duck, Salvadori's duck of Papua New Guinea and the torrent ducks of South America. None of these species are closely related. All have evolved separately to live in the difficult fast-water habitat – a textbook case of convergent evolution. The blue duck is an ancient New Zealand species. It has very simple courtship dis-