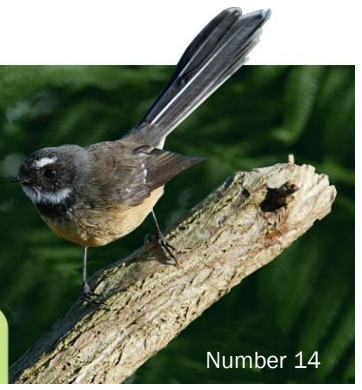


Biodiversity



Number 14

Shortjaw kokopu (*Galaxias postvectis*)

DESCRIPTION

The shortjaw kokopu is the 'kiwi' of the water world: secretive, nocturnal and threatened. It is one of the rarest of the migratory whitebait species and grows to around 150-250mm long. As its name implies, the shortjaw kokopu has an undercut lower jaw. It is a dull velvety brownish-olive in colour, usually with a dark patch just behind the gill opening and various patterns which change as it grows.

DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

The shortjaw kokopu lives primarily at low to moderate elevations in distinctive habitats such as small, stable, bouldery streams. These streams typically have a dense cover of podocarp or broadleaf forest and plenty of in-stream cover such as large logs, overhanging banks and boulders which provide refuge for the kokopu and suits their shy nature. Their diet consists largely of terrestrial invertebrates taken from the surface, such as ants, spiders, cicadas, moths and caterpillars, as well as some in-stream grazing of aquatic invertebrates on boulders.

Its breeding habits have recently become better known, with fish maturing around two to three years of age, spawning during autumn to early winter and laying thousands of small eggs. After hatching, the larvae go to sea and return as whitebait around 19 weeks later, in spring.



SHORTJAW KOKOPU IN TARANAKI

Streams and rivers in Taranaki provide important habitats for shortjaw kokopu, especially some of the small boulder-bedded forested streams flowing from Mount Taranaki. Research techniques developed primarily from work in Taranaki over the past 10 years show this fish is less threatened than first expected. Significant ecological information was discovered from Taranaki populations, including the discovery of spawning sites and habitat use. Taranaki is part of the national survey and monitoring programme under the 'Large Galaxiid Recovery Plan,' to assist the national conservation of this species.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Protect streamside vegetation by fencing it off from stock.
- Plant native plants along stream edges to provide shaded habitats for fish.
- Create, protect and retire native wetlands on your property.
- Remove or provide passage around in-stream barriers such as culverts, dams and weirs.
- Report sightings to the Taranaki Regional Council.



CONSERVATION

Although the shortjaw kokopu is relatively widespread it is listed as 'at risk' as populations are believed to be in decline. Found only in New Zealand, it has been a matter for considerable conservation concern as, until recently, most recorded populations consisted of only a few individuals. However, with the discovery of additional populations their threatened status has been reduced.

THREATS

Threats include:

- Artificial structures such as dams, culverts, and floodgates that block migration paths.
- Habitat loss and degradation.
- Predation and competition by some introduced fish species.
- Changes to estuary and ocean currents due to global warming.

QUICK FACTS

- Usually live for 5-10 years, but can reach up to 15 years of age.
- When young, shortjaw kokopu can climb upstream over steep gradients and small waterfalls.