

Biodiversity



Number 16

Giant kokopu (*Galaxias argenteus*)

DESCRIPTION

Giant kokopu (*Galaxias argenteus*) are the largest member of the Galaxiidae or whitebait family. They usually grow to 300-400mm but have known to reach up to 580mm in length. Like all galaxiids, giant kokopu lack scales and have a thick leathery skin covered with mucus. Their skin is dark olive with a unique pattern of gold lines, spots, crescents and rings.

DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

The giant kokopu occur widely at low elevations up to 400m altitude, preferring small to medium streams, or lake margins that have a gentle flow and an abundance of vegetation. It is an active predator, lurking quietly under cover, awaiting their prey, which ranges from aquatic insects, koura and even terrestrial insects such as cicadas and spiders.

Their spawning habits are not well known, but presumably they spawn at 2-3 years of age, during the autumn and winter months, producing thousands of eggs. Once

hatched, larvae will float to sea and return 4-5 months later as whitebait. Giant kokopu are a long-lived species and have been known to live for more than 20 years.



GIANT KOKOPU IN TARANAKI

Streams and rivers in Taranaki provide important habitats for giant kokopu, especially in the lower altitude, low gradient forested hill country. Giant kokopu are also present in some streams on the Taranaki ring plain. Taranaki is part of the national survey and monitoring programme for the 'Large Galaxiid Recovery Plan' to assist national conservation efforts of this species.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP

- Protect streamside vegetation by fencing it off from stock.
- Plant native plants along stream edges to provide shaded habitats for fish.
- Protect native wetlands as they are important habitat and breeding grounds for freshwater fish.
- Create, protect and retire 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

Giant kokopu have a conservation rating of 'At Risk, Declining'. They were once very common and used as a primary food source for Maori and early settlers.

THREATS

The main threats include:

- Habitat loss and degradation.
- Predation and competition by introduced species.

QUICK FACTS

- Giant kokopu were the first Galaxiidae species to be discovered and its unique colouring was compared to the profusion of stars in the galaxy, earning it the name Galaxias.



TARANAKI REGIONAL COUNCIL
Biodiversity Section
Ph: 06 765 7127 Fax: 06 765 5097
Email: info@trc.govt.nz
www.trc.govt.nz