Shortjaw kōkopu

Searching for a secretive nocturnal fish

Updating information about the species

Many records of shortjaw kōkopu populations need updating. We're currently surveying sites around the country to find out how many populations there are and what habitats they live in.

This species is present throughout the North and South islands but is not usually found on the east coast of either island. The largest known populations are in Northland, Taranaki, Wairarapa, Tasman, Marlborough, and the South Island's West Coast.

Finding their spawning sites is a focus because so little is known about where and when adult shortjaw kōkopu choose to spawn.

About shortjaw kōkopu

Shortjaw kōkopu (*Galaxias postvectis*) is one of New Zealand's five species of migratory galaxiid. It is a taonga (treasured) species, and is nocturnal.

The name galaxiid comes from the patterns on the skin of adult fish that look like a galaxy of stars. The other migratory galaxiids are banded kōkopu, giant kōkopu, kōaro and īnanga.

Migratory galaxiids move between streams, rivers, and the sea during their lifecycles. They are caught as whitebait when the juvenile fish enter rivers and streams to begin their migration upstream.

We need your help

We are looking closely at sites with known populations of these fish. Many of these streams are on private land or require access through private land.

This factsheet is intended to give landowners more information about what's involved if access is requested by DOC.

Shortjaw kōkopu. Image: Angus McIntosh University of Canterbury

Stream surveys

Surveying for shortjaw kōkopu is likely to require two visits to your property. Measurements of their habitat are made during the day and surveys to detect the fish are carried out at night.

Results of the survey will be provided to you and recorded in the New Zealand Freshwater Fish Database.

With your permission, surveys on your land would involve:

- Either walking or driving through your property to reach a stream survey site.
- Looking for shortjaw kōkopu eggs in streamside vegetation, rocks and debris.
- Walking in or along the stream edge using a spotlight to detect fish in the water.
- Fish may be caught in a net for counting, measuring and assessing their spawning potential, but are released back into the stream.
- If no fish are seen, a water sample may be taken for eDNA analysis. This can detect the presence of shortjaw kōkopu.

Department of Conservation
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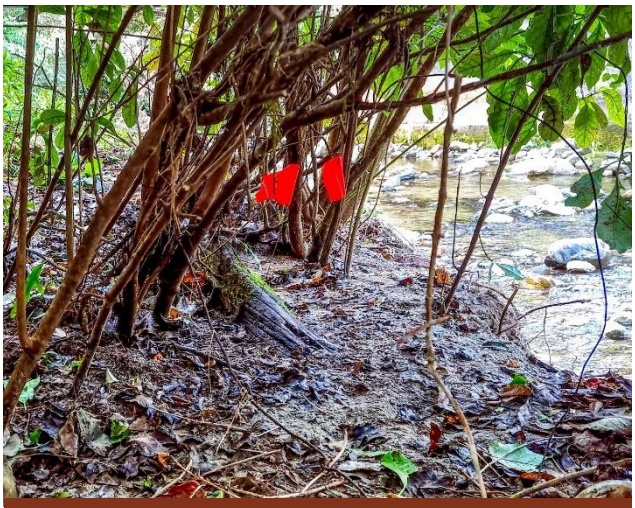
Threats to shortjaw kōkopu

Shortjaw kōkopu have a conservation status of Threatened – Nationally Vulnerable. Many threats and human activities may be contributing to their population decline, including:

- loss of native forest habitat and removal of streamside vegetation
- more intensive land use
- poorer water quality and taking water for irrigation
- barriers that prevent fish migrating up and down streams
- whitebait fishing
- competition and predation from other fish and animals
- climate change – fish spawning and egg survival are affected by rising temperatures and more frequent and severe storms and droughts.



Flags show where shortjaw kōkopu eggs may be present beside a creek in Westland. Image DOC

Enhancing shortjaw kōkopu habitat

- Fence off sections of waterway to prevent stock from damaging fish habitat and spawning sites.
- Plant natives along the edge of a waterway to increase shade and food sources. This also helps reduce sediment and nutrient run-off into the waterway.
- Make sure any new or existing structures in waterways (like culverts) allow fish to travel up and downstream. Check regularly to ensure access is maintained and seek help from DOC or local council.
- Control animal pests near known shortjaw kōkopu populations to help increase egg survival during the spawning season.

More information

There's more information about shortjaw kōkopu and their lifecycle on the DOC website: www.doc.govt.nz/shortjaw-kokopu.

The Freshwater Fish Database is administered by NIWA.

Contact us

Email freshwaterrestoration@doc.govt.nz for more information.

Freshwater Migratory Species Programme
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