

# Biodiversity



Number 21

## Banded kokopu (*Galaxias fasciatus*)

### DESCRIPTION

The banded kokopu is a member of the Galaxiidae or whitebait family. They usually grow to around 200mm long but have been known to reach up to 260mm. Like all galaxiids, the banded kokopu lacks scales and has a thick leathery skin that is covered with mucus. Their dark brownish-olive skin can be distinguished from the other galaxiid species by thin, pale, vertical bands along the sides and over the back of the fish.

### DISTRIBUTION, BREEDING AND FEEDING

Banded kokopu are primarily a lowland species but can penetrate up to 180km inland, and to elevations of 550m. This has allowed them to establish some landlocked populations in lakes in central New Zealand. They are exceptional climbers and can scale steep falls to reach higher catchments.

Preferred habitats for adult banded kokopu are small tributaries with plenty of forest cover. Unlike other kokopu, they don't



seem to mind whether the cover is native vegetation, overgrown pasture or pine plantations. This canopy provides them with shelter, shade and an abundance of terrestrial invertebrates which they primarily feed on.

Females mature any time after three years of age and spawning occurs in autumn-winter in streamside forest litter when it is wetted by high flows. Thousands of eggs develop in the forest litter and hatch during the next high flow. They travel out to sea and small juveniles return three to four months later as whitebait.

### BANDED KOKOPU IN TARANAKI

Banded kokopu are widespread in Taranaki and can be found on the ring plain as well as the eastern and northern hill country. Banded kokopu adults can be often seen in good numbers at night in small mud-bottomed forested streams. They are the most common of the three kokopu species found in Taranaki.

### WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

- Protect streamside vegetation by fencing it off from stock.
- Protect create and retire native wetlands, as they are important breeding grounds for freshwater fish.
- Remove or provide passage around in-stream barriers such as culverts, dams and weirs.
- Please report all sightings to the Taranaki Regional Council.



### CONSERVATION

Banded kokopu are an endemic New Zealand freshwater fish. Despite being the most common kokopu in the region, they have declined substantially in range and abundance and have become increasingly rare in more developed areas.

### THREATS

Threats to this species include:

- Habitat loss and degradation due to deforestation, drainage and new developments.
- Predation and competition by introduced species.

### QUICK FACTS

- Juvenile banded kokopu can sometimes escape from whitebaiters' buckets by clinging to the side and wriggling out.
- As juvenile whitebait, they are golden in colour and are known as 'golden bait'.