

Giant kōkopu

Galaxias argenteus

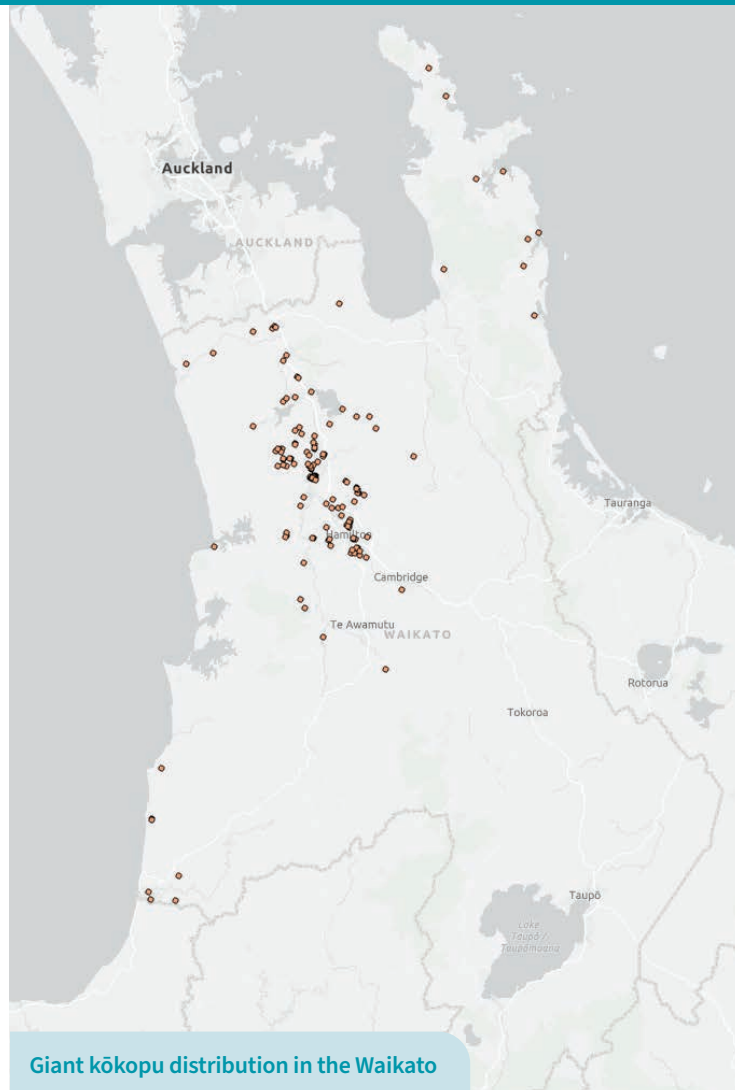
Native

At risk - Declining

Giant kōkopu, like most of New Zealand's native fish fauna, are endemic meaning they are found only here in New Zealand. This 'at risk' species of fish is currently classified as 'declining'. They are one of five species that form the whitebait run, which are all members of the *Galaxias* genus. As the name suggests, they are the largest member of the *Galaxias* genus.

These fish are thought to mature at around two or three years of age and spawn many thousands of eggs. The larvae go to sea for four months before returning as whitebait (40 to 50 millimetres long) when they migrate upstream and live out their lives (15+ years). They are primarily a coastal species but can be found in streams connected to the Waikato River below Lake Karāpiro such as urban streams of Hamilton. Waikato Regional Council research suggests these fish are using lakes in the lower Waikato (such as Lake Waahi) as a 'surrogate sea'. So instead of using the ocean for rearing, juveniles are reared in lakes.

The adults are nocturnal predators of insects that fall into the stream. Fully grown adults have amazing patterning and at that stage should not be confused with other fish. The profusion of small olive and gold spots, lines and rings are apparent over time and can be used to identify the same fish over a number of years. This species was the first in the Galaxiidae family to be discovered and the genus name *Galaxias* refers to the fish's patterns and markings that resemble the stars in a galaxy. Adult giant kōkopu are commonly between 200 and 300 millimetres but fish over 450 millimetres have been recorded.



Giant kōkopu distribution in the Waikato

Photo: The Natural Heritage Collection



Photo: Bruno David



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