

Lamprey/piharau

Geotria australis

Native

Threatened – Nationally vulnerable

These primitive animals look superficially similar to eels with their elongated body shape. Lamprey do not have jaws; instead, they have a large sucking disk as a mouth, which they use to attach themselves to larger host animals where they act as parasites, feeding off the flesh and juices of their host. This parasitic phase takes place in the ocean during their adult phase.

Lamprey come into fresh water after three to four years at sea and migrate upstream to spawn many thousands of eggs (c. 1 millimetre). Once they reproduce, the adults die. The larvae hatch and slowly make their way downstream spending four to five years in fresh water as filter feeders before moving into the ocean.

Hatchlings (ammocoete) resemble small eels because of their shape and colour. They are predominantly found in rivers and streams that drain to the west coast in the Waikato region.

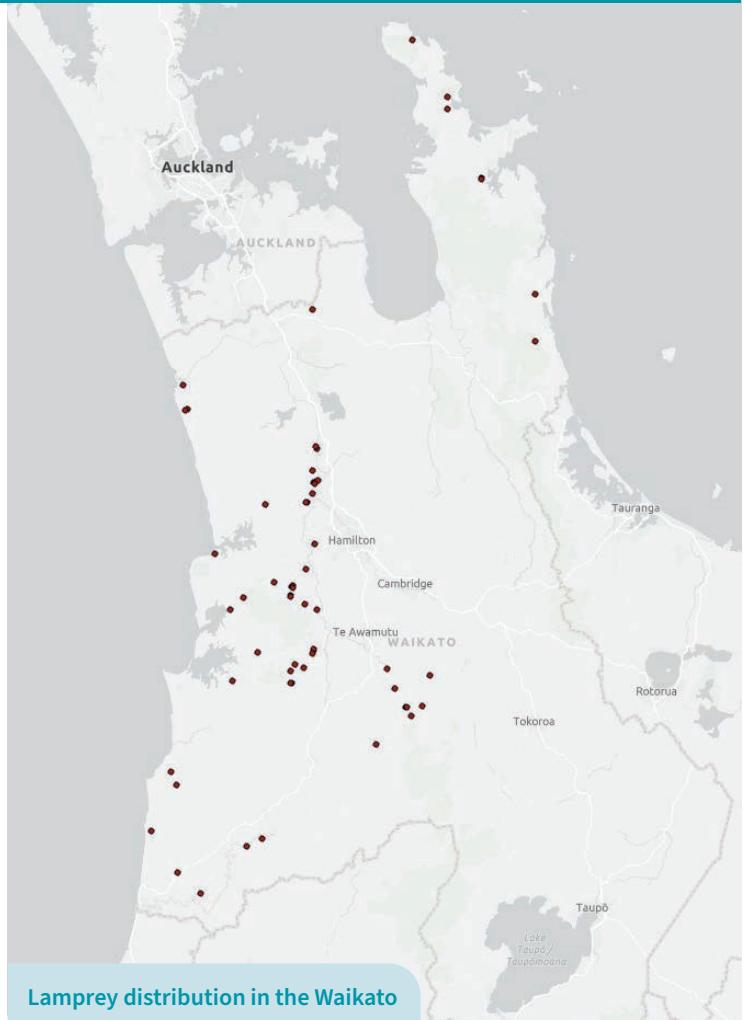


Photo: Bruno David



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