



Giant kōkopu

Galaxias argenteus

STARS OF THE WATER WORLD

What's their superpower?

Giant kōkopu spend their lives between freshwater and the sea. After spawning in freshwater, their larvae are swept out to sea for about five months before returning to their home streams where they spend the rest of their lives.

Why do we need them?

Endemic to Aotearoa New Zealand, they play a major role in keeping the aquatic ecosystem healthy and balanced. By snacking on aquatic and terrestrial insects, freshwater crayfish and spiders, they stop these critters from taking over. They're also food for tuna (freshwater eels) and lots of marine fish species. Plus, they redistribute nutrients to the water through their waste which helps aquatic plants and algae continue to grow.

Fascinating facts

Starry spots: Giant kōkopu have beautiful gold star-like spots, lines, crescent and rings on their bodies which inspired their genus name: *Galaxias* (referring to galaxy).

Masters of hide and seek:

They love to hang out under logs, in shady pools and beneath overhanging plants, waiting to surprise their next meal.

Nighttime navigators: Giant kōkopu are nocturnal, meaning they are

most active and do their feeding at night - it helps them avoid predators and catch unsuspecting prey.

Egg laying machines: Female giant kōkopu are expert egg layers, producing thousands at a time.

Smooth operators: They have no scales but a thick leathery skin covered with mucus that helps reduce friction and protect against infections and parasites.

Habitat: Wetlands, lakes, forest streams and lowland streams near the sea.

Spawning period: Autumn and winter; eggs hatch in spring.

Diet: Aquatic and terrestrial insects, freshwater crayfish, spiders and occasionally other fish.

Size: As the third largest freshwater fish species in Aotearoa, giant kōkopu can grow up to 58 cm (the length of 2 rugby balls) and 2.7 kg (the weight of a brick).

Did you know?

Scientists believe that adult giant kōkopu send out a special chemical signal that acts as a natural GPS, guiding their baby fish back to the safety of their home streams after being at sea.



IMAGE CREDITS: 25CM GALAXIAS ARGENTEUS FROM WAINUI STREAM, PAKAKARIKI, BY STELLA MCQUEEN - NATURALIST PHOTO 379512287 BY ROBIN GRACE

Conservation corner

Giant kōkopu are **At Risk-Declining** nationally and **Threatened-Regionally Critical** in Tāmaki Makaurau. Wetland loss, damaged streams and introduced species are squeezing them out. Restore waterways and keep them clean, and these freshwater giants have a fighting chance to return.

How you can help

- ✓ Set traps beside streams in your area to keep pesky predators like rats, hedgehogs and mice in check.
- ✓ Stop paint, sediment, chemicals, road run-off and rubbish from flowing into storm drains, as these can pollute streams.
- ✓ Plant native vegetation along stream edges to create leafy shade which helps them thrive.
- ✓ If you spot a giant kōkopu, take a photo, note the exact location, date and time, and email biodiversity@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz.
- ✓ Protect streamside vegetation by fencing it off from farm animals.



Get involved with a local group: pfwra.org.nz/find-your-people

More fact sheets and information: livingintheranges.co.nz

