



Tuna / longfin eel

Anguilla dieffenbachii

AOTEAROA'S MAJESTIC MIGRATORS

What's their superpower?

After hanging out in freshwater streams and wetlands for decades, these wriggly rovers head out for what is quite literally their journey of a lifetime.

They glide upstream, scale waterfalls and slither over land before making the more than 2,500 km journey at depths of up to 900 m to a secret spot in a deep ocean trench in the South Pacific where they lay up to 20 million eggs then die.

Their tiny larvae drift back on ocean currents, arriving as clear glass eels that wriggle into estuaries and head upstream. After decades in freshwater, mature tuna turn silver and migrate to sea.

Why do we need them?

As Aotearoa New Zealand's only endemic freshwater eel, they're vital to our ecosystem, both as predator and prey. They also feed on decaying animals which keep waterways clean. Plus, because they're so huge, they need plenty of space which makes them super sensitive to habitat loss. If numbers drop, it's a sign their habitat is in trouble.



Conservation corner

Tuna are **At Risk-Declining**. They grow slowly, breed once and must complete an epic journey to the South Pacific to spawn. Pollution, dams, bare stream banks and overfishing can block the way. Healthy, connected waterways keep that ancient journey alive.

How you can help

- ✓ **Avoid catching them.** If you accidentally do, gently return them to the water.
- ✓ **Fence off stream banks** to keep livestock out and protect eel habitats.
- ✓ **Plant native trees** along stream edges to provide shade, improve water quality and offer food sources.
- ✓ **Stop pollutants** like chemicals, waste or sediment from entering waterways.
- ✓ **Get involved in wetland restoration** projects that aim to restore and protect longfin eels.

Did you know?

They're the world's largest eels. Females can grow to the height of a doorway and weigh roughly as much as a 5-year-old.

Habitat: Rivers and inland lakes mainly but can live in all types of water.

Spawning: Once, at the end of their lives, after migrating to the South Pacific.

Diet: Insect larvae, worms, water snails, fish, freshwater crayfish and small birds.

Fascinating facts

Gone in one gulp: Large eels can eat their food live and whole, including fish and small birds. A 9 kg longfin eel was once reported to have eaten an entire duck.

Slippery seniors: Though their average lifespan is 35–52 years, longfin eels can live for 100+ years – the oldest documented in Aotearoa was 106.

Champion climbers: Young eels are incredible climbers able to scale dams and waterfalls more than 20 m high.

Serial transformers: They go through multiple full-body makeovers during their lives: from larvae to transparent (glass) eels to grey/brown elvers to silver-bellied adults.

Fuelled by fat: They don't eat a single thing during their epic six-month migration to sea. Instead, they survive on fat stored during freshwater years. Because of this, their stomachs shrink to save energy and make way for reproductive organs.



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

More fact sheets and information: livingintheranges.co.nz

