

WHITEBAIT - WHAT ARE THEY?

- Lots of people enjoy the delicacy of whitebait. When caught, whitebait all look very similar, but they will usually grow up to be one of these five species of galaxiid; inanga (*Galaxias maculatus*), koaro (*G. brevipinnis*), banded kokopu (*G. fasciatus*), giant kokopu, (*G. argenteus*) and shortjaw kokopu (*G. postvectis*).
- Inanga, on the West Coast, make up almost 90% of the catch on average. Koaro and banded kokopu make up only 5% each, while giant and short jawed kokopu (both are considered under threat) account for less than 1%.
- All whitebait species that are not landlocked spend part of their life cycle in fresh water and part in the sea. For example inanga have the following life history:
 - a) They lay their eggs amongst the vegetation on the banks of estuaries or wetlands close to the sea. Eggs are laid during the spring tide at the end of summer and into autumn. Most inanga die after egg-laying. When the spring tide recedes the eggs are left to develop out of water where they are shaded and kept moist by waterside vegetation.
 - b) Tiny fish hatch and are carried out to sea during the following spring tide where they will live and grow over the winter.
 - c) During spring juvenile inanga (whitebait) swim back up rivers and streams.
 - d) They spend the summer feeding in a variety of freshwater habitats close to the coast. They like the water to be sheltered by trees and other waterside vegetation. By the end of summer they are mature and move back to the estuaries to spawn.

What adult whitebait look like



INANGA – Slender in shape these fish grow to approximately 10 cm long (longest recorded was 19cm). Their back and sides are olive green, but they have a bright silver belly and gill covers. These fish are found in wetlands, streams, rivers and lakes close to the sea. They feed mostly on insect larvae and other invertebrates. PHOTOGRAPH: Chris Pugsley



KOARO – Are tube like in shape and grow to approximately 18 cm (longest recorded was 28cm). The sides and back of koaro are covered in golden blotches and bands that glisten in the sun. They live in rocky streams in native forests or in lakes. They eat a variety of freshwater insects and crustaceans. PHOTOGRAPH: Stephen Moore



BANDED KOKOPU – They grow to approximately 18 cm (longest recorded was 26cm) and have thin vertical bands along their sides and back. This fish is found in pools in small bouldery streams and creeks that have an overhead canopy of vegetation. They eat aquatic invertebrates and land animals such as spiders and insects that have fallen into the water. PHOTOGRAPH: Stephen Moore



GIANT KOKOPU – This species can grow to 58 cm but are usually around 20-30 cm long. Their back and sides are covered in golden spots, lines, crescents and rings. It is shy and lives in slow moving or still water like lakes and swamps. This fish eats some land animals such as spiders and insects that have fallen into the water as well as aquatic insects and crustaceans. PHOTOGRAPH: Taranaki Regional council



SHORTJAW KOKOPU – Are approximately 15-20 cm long (longest recorded was 35cm) with a large black semicircular marking behind the head. This is the least common of all the whitebait species. It is shy and usually found in streams with large boulders and well forested stream banks. This fish feeds on aquatic invertebrates and land insects that have fallen into the water. PHOTOGRAPH: Dean Caskey