



Australian Government



Native Fish Strategy

FISH FACTSHEET: BONY HERRING (BONY BREEM, HAIRBACK HERRING, PYBERRY)



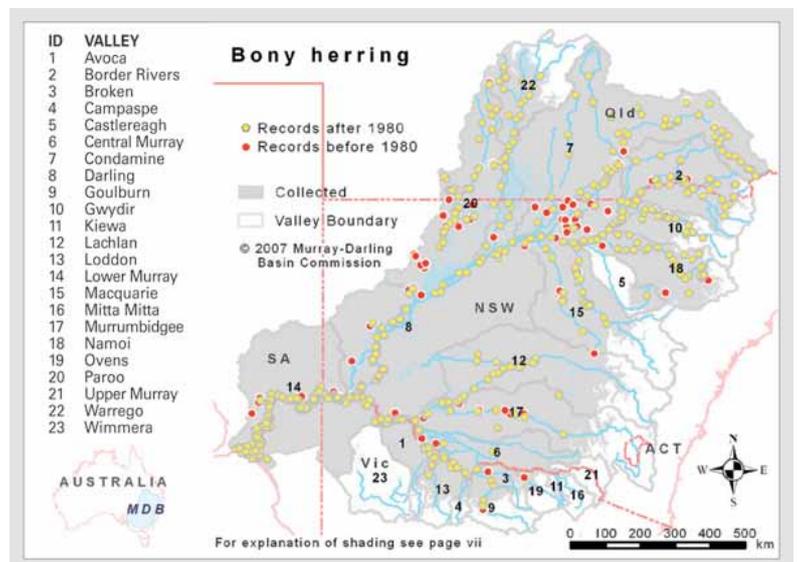
Scientific Name

Nematalosa erebi (Günther, 1868)

photo by Gunther Schmida

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

Widespread and abundant, Bony herring vie with Spangled perch for the distinction of being the most widespread of Australia's native freshwater fish species. Most common in lowland river systems generally, in the Basin they are known from the majority of lowland rivers, where they are often the most abundant native species. They were the most and second-most abundant native fish species in the Pilot Sustainable Rivers Audit and the NSW Rivers survey, respectively. They are commercially fished in Lake Alexandrina, SA. In the Basin, they are largely absent from upland habitats, probably due to low water temperatures.



IDENTIFICATION

A medium sized, laterally compressed, deep-bodied fish with a small head and mouth, large eyes and blunt snout. Maximum size ~470mm; commonly 120-200mm. The tail is large and deeply forked. The single dorsal fin is short-based and, in larger individuals, has a greatly elongated last ray that sometimes extends to the base of the tail. The pectoral fins are small; the pelvic fins are approximately midway along the belly, below the dorsal fin; and the anal fin is long-based. Scales form a serrated ridge on the belly. The back is greenish, the sides bright-silvery iridescent and the belly silvery white; there is no lateral line.

BIOLOGY AND HABITAT

Bony herring are a hardy fish, tolerating high temperatures (up to 38°C), high turbidity, high salinity (up to at least 39 ppt) and low dissolved oxygen. However, they are not tolerant of low water temperatures and, hence, are considered susceptible to the effects of cold-water pollution. Low water temperatures are thought to depress the immune response, allowing increased infection by protozoan parasites and fungi.

In the lower Murray, males mature at 1-2 years and females at 2 years. Fecundity is high, with 33,000-880,000 eggs produced, depending on fish size. The small eggs (0.83mm diameter) are released in the still waters of shallow, sandy bays in October-February. Daytime upstream movements have been recorded for juveniles and adults in the Murray and Murrumbidgee Rivers, and individuals as small as 22mm have been recorded migrating. These movements are possibly related to the colonisation of new habitats by juveniles, as well as reproductive movements by adults.

The species feeds predominantly during daylight hours. It is an algal detritivore, consuming large quantities of detritus, microalgae and microcrustaceans. The amount of algae consumed varies widely between studies. Microcrustaceans were more significant in the diet of juveniles than adults from the Murray River.

Bony herring are consumed by other fish such as Murray cod and Golden perch, and also form a significant part of the diet of waterbirds such as cormorants and Pelicans.

POTENTIAL THREATS

River regulation (barriers to fish passage, cold-water pollution) has reduced the abundance of the species and it is now in low abundance in the Murrumbidgee and Murray rivers below Burrinjuck and Hume Dams.

GENERAL REFERENCES

- Baumgartner 2003;
- Bishop et al . 2001;
- Briggs & McDowall 1996;
- Medeiros 2004;
- Puckridge & Walker 1990;
- Pusey et al . 2004.

PDF LINKS

Fishes of the Murray-Darling Basin: An introductory Guide;

<http://mdba.gov.au/files/publications/MDBA-Fish-species-book.pdf>



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