



Australian Government



Native Fish Strategy

FISH FACTSHEET: SPANGLED PERCH (SPANGLED GRUNTER, JEWEL PERCH)



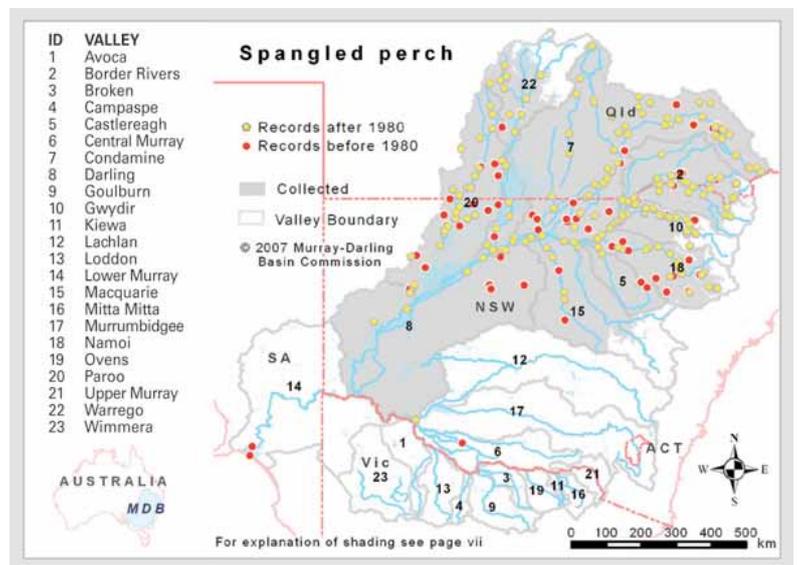
Scientific Name

Leiopotherapon unicolor (Günther, 1859)

photo by Gunther Schmida

DISTRIBUTION AND ABUNDANCE

The Spangled perch is Australia's most widespread native freshwater fish, occurring across most of northern Australia. In the Murray-Darling Basin it occurs on the north and western portions, essentially north of Condamine. It is rare in southern waters of the Basin (down to the Murray), and is recorded in such areas only after extensive flooding in northern rivers. It is not known from the ACT or Vic. Cold winter water temperatures are thought to limit its distribution. This perch can be very abundant, especially after flooding, but this varies with seasonal conditions.



IDENTIFICATION

A small to medium sized, laterally compressed fish with a relatively slender body for a grunter. Maximum size 330mm; rarely 250mm and 560 g; commonly 150mm.

The single dorsal fin has a moderately sized notch between the spinous and soft-rayed portions. The pelvic fins are inserted behind the origin of the pectoral fins. The anal and pelvic fins are white. The back is generally brown to steely-blue and the sides silvery-grey with numerous bronze to rusty-brown spots. The tail is slightly forked, the eye is small to moderate, and the mouth is of moderate size with equal jaws.

BIOLOGY AND HABITAT

The Spangled perch is a hardy species that is well adapted to surviving in diverse environments such as rivers, billabongs, lakes, isolated dams, bore-drains, wells and waterholes in intermittent streams. It can survive temperatures up to 40°C, but doesn't like the cold, with a lower lethal limit of around 4.1°C and markedly lower survival below 7.2°C. It has admirable dispersal abilities which allows it to rapidly colonise habitats not readily accessible to other fish species. During heavy rain it has been observed swimming across flooded paddocks and along wheel ruts on tracks.

Individuals mature in their first year, males at about 58mm length and females at 78mm. Breeding occurs from November to February and fecundity is high and size-dependant, with between 24,000 and 113,200 eggs per female. Spawning occurs when water temperatures are above 20-22°C and a rise in water level is not essential as the species will breed in impoundments. However, flooding maximises recruitment. Spawning occurs at night, in shallow areas such as backwaters or still pools and eggs are spread randomly over the bottom. The eggs are small (0.7mm), round, demersal and non-adhesive and hatch in 45-55 hrs at 23-26°C.

Movement can be associated with spawning or dispersal, and fish move rapidly upstream, downstream or laterally in flooded environments. The Spangled perch feeds mainly during daylight hours and is primarily a carnivore, although it consumes some plant material (~10 % of diet). Aquatic insects, shrimps and prawns, microcrustaceans and fish are important components of the diet, with the relative importance varying between studies and locations.

POTENTIAL THREATS

Spangled perch has lower abundance in regulated rivers, with aspects of river regulation such as cold-water pollution, barriers to fish movement, reduced flooding and access to floodplains likely to disadvantage it.

GENERAL REFERENCES

- Allen et al. 2002;
- Beumer 1979b,c;
- Bishop et al. 2001;
- Bostock et al. 2006;
- Harris & Gehrke 1997;
- Llewellyn 1973;
- Medeiros 2004;
- Merrick 1996;
- Merrick & Schmida 1984;
- 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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