

NELSON NATURE



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Helping our native fish survive

Nelson Nature – Nelson City Council's 10-year programme to restore and protect Nelson's biodiversity – aims to increase the number and diversity of native fish in our urban and rural waterways.

Nelson's urban streams, even including piped culverts, are home to a variety of native fish, some of which are nationally threatened or in decline.

From time to time, the streams are surveyed for fish life, and in one such survey, a 100 metre of Poorman's Valley Stream alone revealed 16 different species living in it.

The rarest of these species is the shortjaw kōkopu, a habitat sensitive species that is found only in New Zealand, with only one ever recorded in Nelson.

Other species identified in our urban streams are similarly in decline. The Giant kōkopu, of which only two have been recorded in Nelson, can grow up

to half a metre in length and live for 25 years or more.

Some native fish such as Inanga and Banded kōkopu are among the species that make up the group of fish called galaxiids (because of the resemblance their skin has to a galaxy of stars). Most of us know them as whitebait.

With such a diversity and number of species already living in our streams, it is important that we protect this taonga and ensure that while it isn't possible to return our waterways into the forested streams they once were, we provide them with the best urban habitat possible.

Why do the creatures living in our urban streams have such a hard time surviving?

Waterways are no longer the clean and shady places they once were: water becomes heated without shade, there is less insect life to feed on, and there are fewer places to seek refuge. Then, as the fish try and make their way up



A banded kokopu.

PHOTO: MARTIN RUTLEDGE/DOC

the streams, they are blocked by barriers such as dams and culverts. There are things that you can do to help these unique little creatures survive.

■ All outside drains lead directly to the nearest stream or the sea.

Prevent anything other than rain going into stormwater drains – even seemingly harmless or “eco-friendly” products will harm aquatic life

■ Fence margins of streams to prevent stock from trampling

banks and defecating into fresh water.

■ Plant stream edges to enhance habitat. Native grasses and shady native trees are ideal.

■ Avoid walking – either yourself or your dog – in the long grasses alongside water edges where fish are spawning as eggs remain out of water for several weeks. In popular spots, signs will indicate inanga spawning sites to remind you to avoid trampling on stream edges.

■ Never dump rubbish, including green waste, into streams. This not only contaminates the stream, but is the prime source of environmental weeds invading our wider environments.

■ If whitebaiting, stick to the fishing regulations and keep your catch small.

■ Consider setting up or joining a community stream care group that can be involved in protecting and enhancing a stretch of your local stream.



Simon and Robin Albrecht alongside a tributary of the Wakapuaka River that they fenced and planted with native species with support from the council.

Stock fencing grant available

Landowners with stock that graze near an unfenced river or stream are being urged to take advantage of the council's Rural Fencing Grant, which contributes up to half the cost of fencing.

The aim is to stop stock entering and defecating in Nelson's waterways, destroying the natural aquatic environment for fish life and making water unsafe for swimming or recreational use.

The Government is proposing

changes to the Resource Management Act, which may result in new regulations making it compulsory to exclude stock from waterways. Although this change is not yet in force, landowners are encouraged to consider fencing waterways ahead of this potential law change.

Council staff are also happy to offer advice to all landowners wanting to undertake native restoration and regeneration projects on rural land, including

riparian planting. As part of the Nelson Nature project, Council may be able to help by contributing eco-sourced, native trees to assist in enhancing our city's biodiversity.

If you wish to apply for a grant toward the cost of your proposed fencing, or would like advice and support for riparian planting, please contact Council's land management advisor Lynne Hall, lynne.hall@ncc.govt.nz or ph 03 546 0308.

Freshwater fun day

North Nelson residents and Nelson City Council are coming together to host a Freshwater Family Fun Day for those who would like to find out more about Nelson's rivers and the Wakapuaka River in particular.

Pack a picnic and lock in Saturday, March 19, 11am to 2pm, at the Hira Reserve to take part in a whole host of activities such as electric fishing, games and a treasure hunt.

There will also be a sausage sizzle and a bouncy castle.

Hira School children have been monitoring water quality in the Wakapuaka River for several years and will share some of what they have learned.

Take time to discover what lives in the river, why rivers are so important and get some tips about what you can do to help improve the water quality in your own local stream – whether it is the Wakapuaka, the Maitai/Mahitahi or any of Nelson's rivers, they can all do with a little help.



Pupils from Hira School monitor water quality in the Wakapuaka River.

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