

Fishes of a Fish Friendly Farm



Check out a few of the native fish you are likely to see in the waterways that run through your farm and learn some of the fish friendly actions you can take to support their habitat.

Smooth Marron *Cherax cainii*



Distribution: Hutt River to Esperance

Marron live in rivers, lakes, farm dams and other permanent water bodies. Marron can tolerate waters with some salinity (up to 17g/l), though their growth rate is generally slower the saltier the water.

Marron do not do well in low oxygen conditions and high temperatures (above 29°C). Having healthy shoreline vegetation along the river bank on your farm can add shade to shallow pools in summer and ensure temperatures don't get too high. Marron can actually feed on terrestrial organic matter so the leaves and branches these native trees and bushes will naturally drop into the water will not only provide shelter for marron from predators such as redfin perch, but also a potential food source. In a healthy system Marron can be fast growing and can reach over 400mm and weigh over 2kg in the right conditions. They will reach sexual maturity between 2 and 3 years old.

Western Pygmy Perch *Nannoperca vittata*



Distribution: Arrowsmith River (between Leeman and Dongara) and Waychinnicup River (east of Albany)

Western Pygmy Perch live in freshwater habitats, both flowing and still. They can tolerate moderately saline waters and can be found in high densities in small agricultural drains, so keep an eye out for these on around your farm. Reaches sexual maturity toward the end of the first year of life, with maximum age around 5 years. Their diet is largely made up of microcrustaceans and insects and they readily consume mosquito larvae. To maximise the food available to Pygmy perch, fencing off the bank from livestock can enable complex habitats that insects live in to develop.

Western Minnow *Galaxias occidentalis*



Distribution: Arrowsmith river (between Leeman and Dongara) and Waychinnicup River (east of Albany).

Rivers, creeks, lakes and wetlands are all areas the Western Minnow can be found. They are most common in clear freshwaters, however can tolerate tannin stained and moderately saline waters. The Western Minnow can live for up to 5 years and reaches sexual maturity after 1 year. Once sexually mature, females will lay their eggs on inundated vegetation as waterways swell over winter. These native minnows feed on microcrustaceans and insects so healthy riparian zones play an important role in generating food sources. They are strong swimmers for their size and are able to swim at up to 4.32km/hr allowing them to move up fish ladders or over rapids.

Pouched Lamprey *Geotria australis*



Distribution: Perth to Albany

Lampreys are ancient creatures and have a fascinating lifecycle that will likely have them moving through your waterways at some stage of their lives during their upstream migration. They move up stream from the ocean during winter and spring as juveniles into freshwater systems where they mature and breed. Whilst they are breeding they do not feed and must survive on fat reserves. Just like Salmon in Canada, Lampreys will die after breeding. Their larvae live buried in sandy stream sediments and filter plankton algae and fine detritus for up to 4 years, before metamorphosing into juveniles and migrating downstream to the sea. Because lampreys make these massive migrations, it is vital that there are no blockages to fish passage on you property.



Lampreys make incredible migrations from the ocean up to freshwater rivers so need clear fish passage.

Nightfish *Bostockia porosa*



Reintroducing wood habitat into waterways can create more productive systems.

Distribution: Hill River (near Jurien Bay) and the Kalgan River (near Albany)

Nightfish are found nowhere in the world except for the southwest corner of WA! Despite their big mouth they only grow to 15cm and spend most of their time out of the main flow of rivers in still and slow-moving waters. They rely on complex habitat (lots of rocks, logs and sticks) to ambush its prey (insects, crustaceans, gastropods and small fish). Adults are nocturnal, and hide during the day. Leaving complex habitat such as large snags and fallen trees in your waterways are important for ambush feeders such as Nightfish. If the large trees and structure have been removed from your waterway, reintroducing these structures can create a more productive system. Contact the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions for advice if you wish to reintroduce snags to your waterway.



This kind of instream wood habitat is exactly where ambush predators like night fish like to hide.



Black Bream *Acanthopagrus butcheri*



Distribution: Throughout the south west as north as the Murchison River.

Most bream never leave the system that they were spawned in, which means the fish friendly actions you take on your farm can directly impact on the quality of your bream fishing. Adults rely on complex habitat for shelter and food, while juveniles are often found in the shallows. Bream are well adapted to the huge range of conditions that can occur in the southwest, from floods to droughts and are able to survive a wide range of salinities, from freshwater through to hypersaline waters (saltier than the sea). Despite their hardiness, declining water qualities in many rivers have led to slower growth rates and smaller sizes at sexual maturity. While in a healthy system with good water quality and rich food sources bream can reach the minimum legal size for retention in a couple of years, habitat degradation and decreased water quality mean that in some systems it now takes over 12 years for a bream to reach this size! Decreased freshwater flows combined with high levels of nutrients can lead to rivers becoming periodically anoxic, destroying habitat and food sources.



Bream can grow quickly with rich food sources. These glass shrimp were found hiding under a log.

Mulloway *Argyrosomus japonicus*



Distribution:

Mulloway can be found in estuaries and out to sea all along the south coast and up the west coast beyond Shark Bay. Juveniles rely heavily on healthy estuaries to grow. Juveniles grow quickly, and in a healthy system can reach around 90cm in length within their first 5 years. In order to grow this quickly, they rely on abundant food sources including crustaceans and small fish. When water quality in the rivers that flow into an estuary is poor, this can have a direct impact on the amount and quality of food available for juvenile mulloway in the lower estuary and have long term impacts of the quality of Mulloway that live in these systems.



In a healthy system with good water quality and rich food sources, juvenile mulloway can push right up rivers. (Left image: Vasily Gamayunov).

For more information on identifying WA fish and for up to date information on all the fishing rules and regulations download the free Recfishwest App.



Images courtesy of the Murdoch Freshwater Fish Group & Fish Health Unit.



Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

