

## NATIVE SPECIES

**Common Name** Southern pygmy perch (Swamp perch)

**Threatened**

**Scientific Name** *Nannoperca australis* Günther, 1861



Photo: Michael Hammer

### Identification

A small, laterally compressed fish with a deeply notched single dorsal fin. Maximum size 85 mm; usually less than 65 mm. The tail is squarish to slightly rounded, and the mouth is small, reaching to just below the front of the eye. The lower edge of the preorbital bone is hidden under skin, and is curved with a smooth (non-serrate) edge (compare with Yarra pygmy perch). The lateral line is discontinuous. Body colour varies from cream to gold-orange to a greenish-brown, darker on the dorsal surface, and almost white on the belly, with a series of dark blotches on the side. Males in the breeding season have bright red dorsal, anal and inner caudal fins. Breeding males also have prominent black colouration on the pelvic and anal fins and around the vent.

### Biology and Habitat

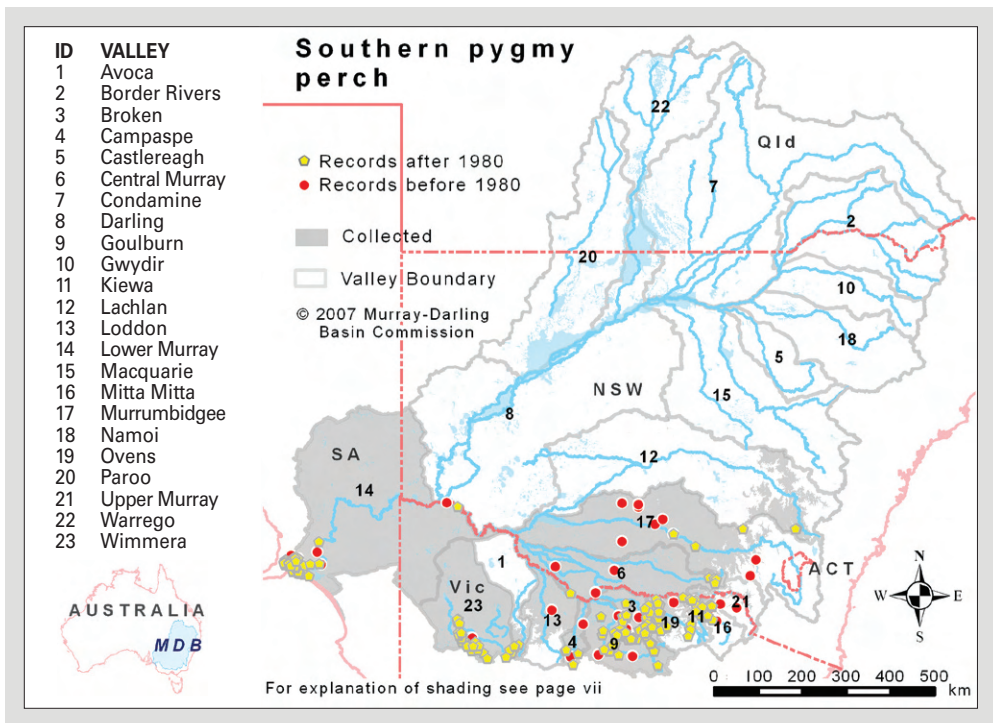
The Southern pygmy perch prefers slow flowing or still waters, usually with dense aquatic vegetation and plenty of cover. It has been recorded from small streams,

well-vegetated lakes (or wetlands within), billabongs and irrigation channels. Fish can live for 5 years or more although most individuals in a population are less than 3 years old. Females grow larger than males and both sexes mature in their first year at 30–33 mm. Spawning usually occurs between September and January when water temperatures exceed 16°C, and males are territorial when breeding. Depending on their size, females produce 100–4,200 round, transparent and non-adhesive eggs. The eggs are scattered over the bottom or aquatic vegetation and hatch in 2–4 days, with the larvae about 3–4 mm long.

Southern pygmy perch are carnivorous, eating cladocerans, copepods, ostracods and small insect larvae such as chironomids, mayflies, mosquito larvae and water bugs.

### Distribution and Abundance

Formerly found in the Murray and lower Murrumbidgee catchments, the Southern pygmy perch has now disappeared from most locations in NSW and has only been recorded



from a handful of sites in the last 25 years. New populations are occasionally discovered, most recently in the Lachlan drainage north of Yass. In NSW only two other populations are currently known, from near Holbrook and Albury. The species is still present in the Mount Lofty Ranges, the Lower Lakes and the lower Murray in SA, where it is highly threatened. It is still common in southern (coastal) Vic, but is patchily distributed along Vic tributaries of the Murray, where it is still known from the Broken, Ovens, Campaspe, Goulburn, Kiewa, Mitta Mitta, Loddon and Wimmera basins.

Recent genetic studies have shown that there are two species within the Southern pygmy perch: an eastern coastal species and a species in the Basin and western coastal streams. The Basin form likely represents a separate subspecies and is never particularly abundant in any location, having suffered severe declines and fragmentation of populations since the 1970s.

### Potential Threats

Predation by alien species such as trout, Redfin perch and possibly Eastern gambusia is thought to have played a role in the decline of this species. Habitat alteration such as loss of aquatic vegetation, floodplain alienation, cold-water pollution and seasonal flow changes/reductions is also likely to be involved.

### General References

Hammer 2002a; Higham *et al.* 2005; Humphries 1995; Kuitert *et al.* 1996; Lintermans & Osborne 2002; Llewellyn 1974, 1980; Lloyd & Walker 1986; Morris *et al.* 2001; Unmack 1992; Woodward & Malone 2002.

Published by the Murray-Darling Basin Commission  
Postal address: GPO Box 409, Canberra ACT 2601  
Office location: Level 3, 51 Allara Street, Canberra City ACT  
Telephone: (02) 6279 0100, international + 61 2 6279 0100  
Facsimile: (02) 6248 8053, international + 61 2 6248 8053  
Email: [info@mdbc.gov.au](mailto:info@mdbc.gov.au)  
Internet: <http://www.mdbc.gov.au>

For further information contact the Murray-Darling Basin Commission office on (02) 6279 0100

This fish fact sheet is an extract derived from the report:  
Lintermans, M. 2007, *Fishes of the Murray-Darling Basin: An introductory guide*.

MDBC Publication No. 10/07

ISBN 1 921257 20 2

© Murray-Darling Basin Commission 2007

This work is copyright. Graphical and textual information in the work (with the exception of photographs, artwork and the MDBC logo) may be stored, retrieved and reproduced in whole or in part provided the information is not sold or used for commercial benefit and its source (*Fishes of the Murray-Darling Basin*) is acknowledged. Such reproduction includes fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*. Reproduction for other purposes is prohibited without the permission of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission or the individual photographers and artists with whom copyright applies.

To extent permitted by law, the copyright holders (including its employees and consultants) exclude all liability to any person for any consequences, including but not limited to all losses, damages, costs, expenses and any other compensation, arising directly or indirectly from using this report (in part or whole) and any information or material contained in it.