



Government of Western Australia
Department of Fisheries

AQUATIC BIOSECURITY ALERT

Spangled perch (*Leiopotherapon unicolor*)



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**PROTECTING OUR
WATERS FROM AQUATIC
PESTS AND DISEASES**

Have you seen or caught this fish species in waters south of Geraldton?

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Distinguishing features

- Small to medium-sized fish up to 25 centimetres in length.
- Slender body.
- Spiny dorsal fin with a softer-rayed back portion separated by a notch.

What to do if you see one:

- Make a note of when and where you saw it, including GPS readings if possible and photographs. Report sightings to the Department of Fisheries:
T: 1800 815 507 or E: biosecurity@fish.wa.gov.au

What to do if you catch one:

- Do **not** return it to the water.
- Dispatch the fish humanely - the RSPCA has further details; search their website, www.rspca.org.au, using the term 'humanely euthanase fish'.
- If you are able to collect a fish as a specimen for the Department of Fisheries, keep the dead fish frozen.
- Make a note of when and where you caught it, including GPS readings if possible and photographs. Report these details to the Department of Fisheries, letting them know you have a frozen sample.
T: 1800 815 507 or E: biosecurity@fish.wa.gov.au.

- Distinguished from its relative the yellowtail grunter (*Amniataba caudavittata*) which is naturally found in the Canning River and Swan River and does not present a biosecurity risk, the spangled perch has a white stripe on the anal fin.
- The yellowtail grunter can be further distinguished from spangled perch by characteristic bars on the trumpeter's tail.



Spangled perch (*Leiopotherapon unicolor*)
Photo: Mark Allen, Murdoch University



Yellowtail grunter (*Amniataba caudavittata*)
Photo: David Morgan, Murdoch University

What biosecurity risk does the spangled perch present?

While it is Australia's most widely distributed freshwater species, in Western Australia spangled perch is not naturally found south of the Murchison River in the State's mid-west. In late 2011 populations of spangled perch were detected near the Canning River. These were likely to have been released by a member of the public who did not understand the biosecurity risk these fish present in the South-west

Spangled perch is an exceptionally hardy species, tolerating water temperatures from 10° C to 44° C and wide-ranging salinity levels from freshwater to seawater. In comparison to native freshwater fishes of southern Western Australia, it is one of the largest aquatic predators introduced to southern inland waters. Spangled perch are generally omnivorous and opportunistic feeders, eating a wide variety of prey including small aquatic insects, fish, molluscs (eg. water snails), crustaceans (eg. shrimps) as well as plant matter. The diet of spangled perch is diverse and, being active during the day, means this species could directly compete with native freshwater fishes of southern Western Australia.

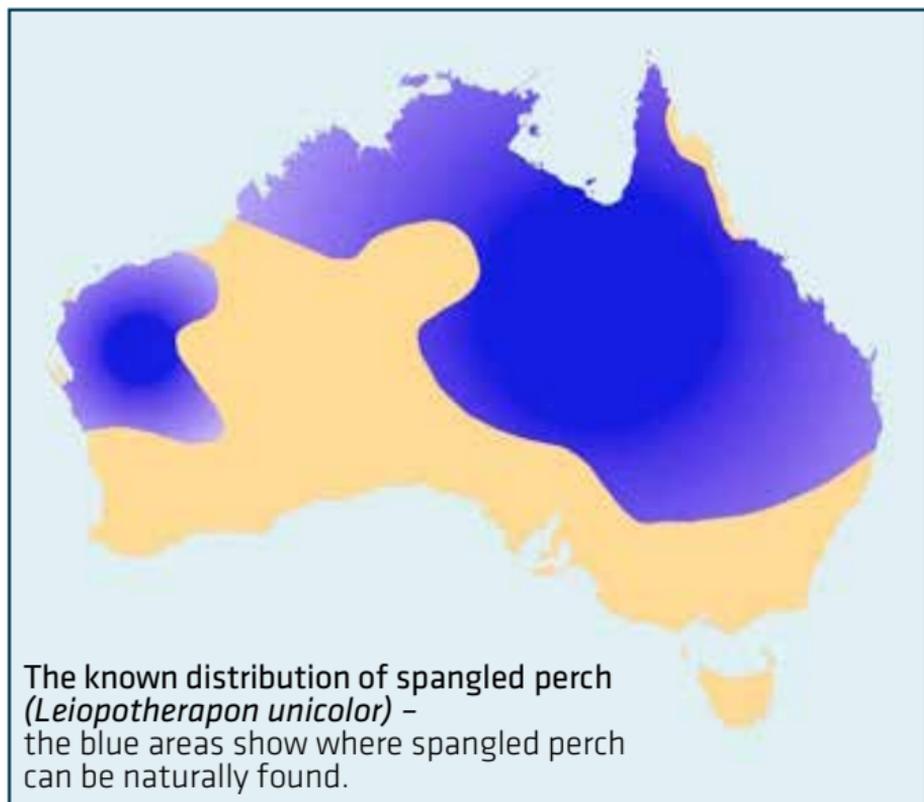
Its hardy nature and ability to quickly spread over wide areas quickly the fish practically impossible to get rid of once established in river systems and waterways outside its natural range. The spangled perch matures sexually in its first year and females spawn a large number of eggs (between 24,000 and 113,000) in the November to February spawning season. As a result of this, the population can multiply quickly.

In addition, spangled perch can hybridise with yellowtail grunter, leading to changes in the genetic make-up of this native species.

The spangled perch's ability to spread over large geographic areas allows it to rapidly colonise habitats not readily accessible to other fish species. During heavy rain, spangled perch have been seen swimming across flooded fields and along wheel ruts in road tracks.

Spangled perch can potentially have a highly destructive impact on native aquatic species if introduced to waters outside its natural range. The spangled perch can attack populations of a wide variety of native aquatic life, severely reducing their numbers. Its aggressive nature and ability to occupy wide areas of the State mean it may compete with other native species for food and habitat.

Where does the spangled perch naturally live and what kind of environments can it spread to?



The spangled perch is Australia's most widespread native freshwater fish and is found in a wide range of aquatic habitats including flowing streams, small billabongs, lakes, dams, drains and bores.

It is found in most coastal ranges north of the Murchison River in Western Australia across the Top End and southwards to the Hunter River in New South Wales and the Murray-Darling system north of Condobolin, also in New South Wales. It also inhabits the Lake Eyre/Bulloo-Bancania Drainage System.

If you keep any fish for ornamental or other purposes

Never introduce fish into the wild. Fish tanks and ornamental fishponds should be designed so fish can't escape. Unwanted fish should be taken back to suppliers or disposed of humanely. The RSPCA has further details; search their website, www.rspca.org.au, using the term 'humanely euthanase fish'.

References

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