

Golden Perch



Photo: Rodney Price

Golden Perch is a species commonly targeted by recreational fishers. It is a resilient species however habitat change has led to major reductions in the numbers of these fish.

If you'd like to know more about Golden Perch, its habitat and the things we need to do if we want to keep fishing for this lovely fish, read on ...

Golden Perch, also known as Yellowbelly or Callop (*Macquaria ambigua ambigua*), can be found in river, creeks and billabongs. There may be three to five genetically different populations of Golden Perch in different areas of their range.^{1,2}

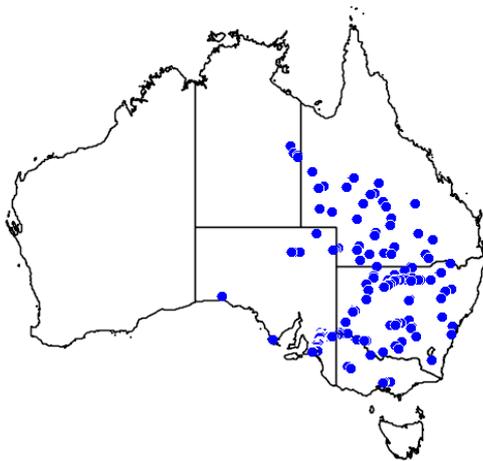


Figure 1: Distribution of Golden Perch
(Source: Atlas of Living Australia,
<http://bie.ala.org.au>)

Golden Perch Habitat Fact File

Golden perch naturally inhabit the Murray Darling Basin, Dawson, Fitzroy Rivers and the Bulloo and Lake Erye drainages^{3,4}

Slow flowing, lowland rivers are the preferred habitat

Outside the breeding season they occupy a home range of about 100m^{1,5}

Flow and migration are important to reproductive success. Golden Perch have been recorded migrating 2 000km during the breeding season²

Re-snagging, increased natural flows and access to vital habitat will ensure the future of this popular species



Adults feed on shrimp, crayfish, small fish and aquatic insect larvae.^{1,3} Their prey is found in and around **aquatic vegetation, snags and under-cut banks.**

Males are able to breed at 2-3 years (20-30cm) and females at 4 years (40cm)^{1,3}

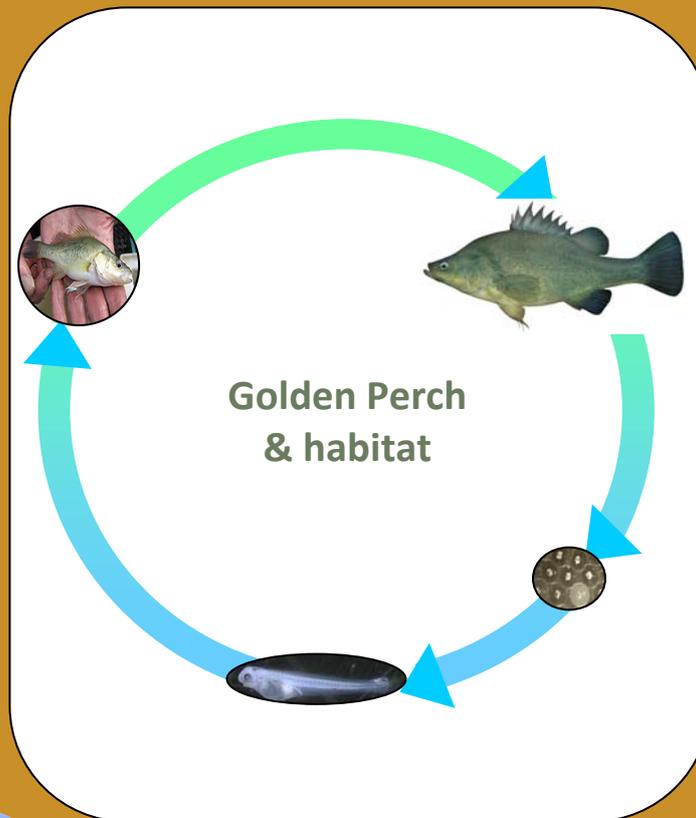
Females can hold their eggs until spawning conditions are **favourable**⁶

Upstream movements by both immature and adult fish are stimulated by **small rises in the water level**

Most movement occurs between October and April^{1,5}

It takes about **5 years** for a fish to grow to 430mm.

After about 1 year the juveniles are about 150mm long⁶



Spawning occurs at night in **flooded backwaters and inundated flood plains** after spring and summer rain when water temperatures exceed 20°C¹

A female weighing 2.5kg can produce well over **500 000 eggs**⁶

The semi-buoyant eggs **float** near the surface and hatch in 24 to 36 hours^{2,7}



Newly hatched larvae are about 3.2mm long and float upside down. After about 5 days, they start to swim and feed⁶

Juveniles feed on **zooplankton**²



Threats to Golden Perch habitat

The main threats to Golden Perch are barriers such as dams and weirs, which reduce both fish access to habitat and natural flows. Golden Perch rely on migration for growth and reproduction. Barriers to migration can also change natural patterns and seasonality of water flow, cause cold water pollution and create conditions that favoured by pest species, like carp.

The removal of snags, or 'large woody debris', is detrimental because they mark territory and feeding areas and provide shelter. The riparian zone is critical to in-stream fish habitat as it naturally introduces new snags and stabilises banks.



Weirs represent a barrier to migrating Golden Perch. There are 10000 of barriers to migration along the rivers and creeks in the Murray-Darling Basin alone.



Degraded riverbanks, such as this one on the Murray River, mean more sediment entering the water, no natural addition of snags and no shade or shelter provided by overhanging vegetation.

Threats to habitat	Impact on Golden Perch
Barriers to migration - Dams and weirs - Road crossings	✘ Decline of important natural flow variation. ✘ Loss of migratory pathways ✘ Reduced water quality ✘ Isolation of populations
River regulation	✘ Cold water pollution affecting the feeding, growth and development ✘ Loss of habitats for reproduction and early life stages
Habitat removal and alteration - De-snagging - Altered river channels - Damage and removal of riparian vegetation - Bank erosion - Sedimentation	✘ Loss of effective cover for ambushing prey ✘ Loss of habitat for prey ✘ Loss of protection from predators ✘ Reduction in shelter ✘ Reduction in formation of new snags and habitat ✘ Reduced water quality
Pests and weeds	✘ Clogging up of waterways ✘ Competition for shelter and snags for territory, feeding and breeding ✘ Introduced fish species reducing water quality, competing for food and preying upon juveniles

What you can do

- ✓ Get your hands dirty with re planting native riparian vegetation and removing weeds.
- ✓ Help a farmer fence off a waterway to reduce bank erosion.
- ✓ Don't release redfin and carp.
- ✓ Support removal of flow barriers and natural flow regimes for dams and weirs.
- ✓ By improving fish habitat in the Condamine River, Myall and Oakey Creeks, the Dewfish Demonstration Reach Project increased Golden Perch numbers by 1000%.
For more information: www.condaminealliance.com.au
- ✓ Visit www.fishhabitatnetwork.com.au and find out what other fishers are doing to improve their local fish habitats
- ✓ Follow the Fish Habitat Network on Facebook (www.facebook.com/fishhabitatnetwork)



References

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