

Merton & Brankeet Creeks Project update

Hi Everyone,

As you are aware, the fish surveys were conducted last week with almost all the suggested sites as mapped being surveyed, to total 13. We had a great electrofishing demonstration and presentation from Jason Lieschke and Renae Ayres from ARI (Arthur Rylah Institute) Wednesday morning, learning how surveys are conducted and the different fish species captured to date.



We learnt then that southern pigmy perch had been recorded at two of the sites already surveyed on Merton Creek, but can now report that this rare species (for north of the divide) was actually found on the Brankeet Creek too. Yay!

Three sites on the Merton and four on the Brankeet were found to have southern pigmy perch, but only within suitable aquatic habitat. As seen in the example images attached, fringing and aquatic vegetation is a critical habitat for these small fish, hence this habitat when present was targeted in the surveys to successfully find them. Southern pigmy perch were not found away from the protection of aquatic plants and were not found in the most upstream and downstream surveys sites, favouring the middle reaches of both streams.

Several other native fish species were recorded, including river blackfish, flatheaded gudgeon, obscure galaxias and Australian smelt. Rainbow trout, brown trout, redfin, gambusia and carp were also recorded, particularly on the Brankeet Creek where they appeared to be pushing upstream from the Lake.

A summary report of the fish surveys is presently being compiled, which when complete will provide further details of results. It is great news for southern pigmy perch to be found on both streams and highlights the importance of good fringing and instream vegetation cover.

The macro-invertebrate surveys are scheduled to occur next week (23-24/11), undertaken by Kirsten and Dani from Waterwatch. As several of the same sites will be surveyed, we hope to attain further insights into the habitat quality and possibly identify correlations between fish and macro-invertebrate survey results.

Macro-invertebrates are commonly utilised as indicators of stream condition, so it will be interesting to see if, and where, variations are found.

I will keep you posted on our findings.

Kind regards,
Christine