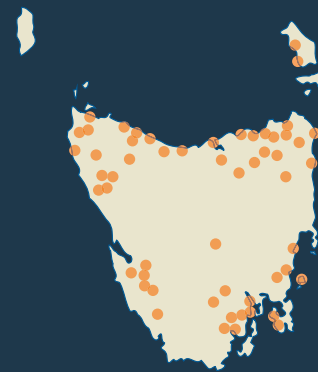


# Shorthead lamprey

*Mordacia mordax*



Common and widespread in coastal and lowland rivers.

**Description:** Primitive jawless fishes with eel-like bodies, two low dorsal fins far back on the body and seven pairs of enlarged pore-like gill openings. They have eyes on top of their head and a prominent hood-like structure overhanging the mouth. The oral sucking disc is armed with tooth plates arranged in a radial pattern. Their ammocoete larvae are worm-like and lack eyes and teeth.

**Colour:** The early post-larvae are greyish-brown above and silvery below. Young adults are bright blue above, with silvery sides and ventral surface. Mature adults are blue-grey above, silvery below and have orange teeth when in freshwater.

**Size:** Young fish to 110 mm, and adults commonly to 330 mm.

**Habitat:** Shorthead lampreys have an anadromous life cycle, spending parts of their life cycle in freshwater and in sea. The adults spawn in freshwater, and their ammocoete larvae spend several years living in freshwater streams. Following metamorphosis, they migrate downstream and spend most of their adult lives at sea, returning to freshwater streams to spawn.

**Diet:** The ammocoete larvae filter feed on plankton, detritus and microalgae. The adults are parasitic on other fishes and attach to their host with their sucking disc. They use their toothy tongue to rasp flesh and feed on the body fluids and muscle of the host. The adults cease to feed during their migration back to freshwater, surviving on stored fats and body tissues.

**Life Cycle:** Lampreys have several distinct stages in their life cycle. Filter feeding ammocoete lamprey larvae bury themselves in the substrate of streams for up to three years. After a metamorphosis, the young fish then migrate downstream to the sea where they become parasitic feeders. After one to two years at sea the adult lampreys return to the streams to spawn. They require waters with sand, gravel or pebble substrates for spawning. They die after spawning. Hatchlings stay in the gravel feeding off their yolk-sacs until they emerge as ammocoete and disperse.

**Distribution status:** Native.

**Original range:** Tasmania wide distribution, also found in coastal rivers of South Australia and Victoria.

**Reasons for change to distribution:** Large instream barriers such as hydroelectric dams restrict their distribution. The Inland Fisheries Service moves some lamprey upstream of large dams.

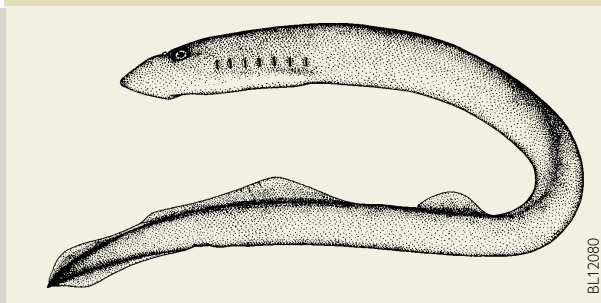
**Legal status:**

**Can it be taken?** N/A.

**Other names:** Blood sucker, lamprey eel.



Photo Rudie Kuitert



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