



Exotic freshwater clams

The exotic freshwater clams *Corbicula fluminea* and *Corbicula australis* are small shellfish that reproduce rapidly, forming high density populations that can clog water pipes and out-compete native species. *Corbicula fluminea* was first found in the Waikato River at Bob's Landing near Lake Karāpiro in May 2023. *Corbicula australis* was found in a small, contained water park near Taupō in March 2024.

About the clams

Corbicula fluminea is native to Southeast Asia but has become widespread in North and South America and Europe.

Corbicula australis is native to Australia, where it is common and widely distributed.

Both are found in freshwater. They can survive a wide range of temperatures and can live in:

- lakes, and rivers down to the where saltwater and freshwater mix;
- on top of, or buried in, a variety of substrates (for example gravel, sand, mud);
- high oxygen waters and are found in highest abundance around the edges of lakes and rivers.

Why they are a problem

These clams are prolific breeders, able to produce 400 juveniles a day and up to 70,000 juveniles a year, allowing them to reach extremely high densities. This means they can clog water-based infrastructure, such as electricity generation plants, irrigation systems, and water treatment plants. They can compete with native species for food and space.

Corbicula fluminea and *Corbicula australis* are unwanted organisms under the Biosecurity Act, which means you must not knowingly move them, or water that might contain them. Legal controls are in place for parts of the Waikato River and the water park to prevent spread. Find out more and what you need to do on our website at www.biosecurity.govt.nz/clam

Help us find the clams

We're asking people to look out for both species of *Corbicula* clams.

Adult clams are 2–3cm in length and are typically dirty white, yellow or tan in colour.

They have an obvious ribbed texture on the shell. These clams are found in freshwater or brackish water (near river mouths), sitting on top of sandy or muddy surfaces, or buried shallowly within them.

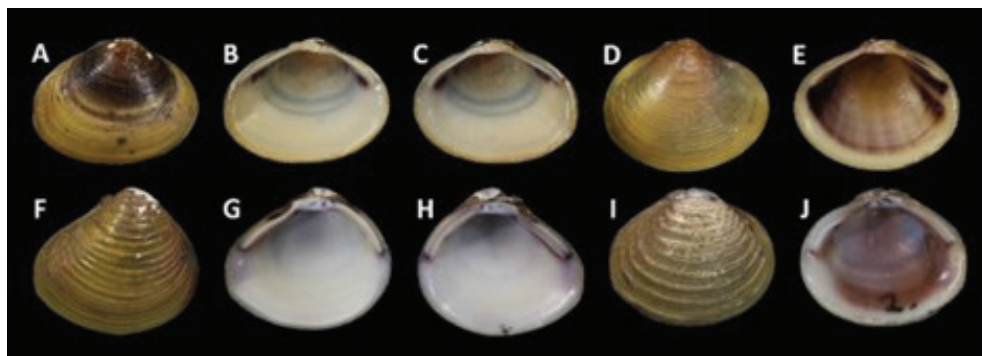
You may see their shells partly exposed, or syphons (breathing tubes) sticking out from the sediment. They can also be found among debris, such as leaves, that may have settled on the river or lake bed.

If you find either of these freshwater clams:

- note the location;
- take a photo if possible;
- do not move them – it is an offence under the Biosecurity Act;
- contact Biosecurity New Zealand on **0800 80 99 66**;
- or complete the online reporting form at <https://report.mpi.govt.nz/>.



Corbicula fluminea on the riverbed at Bob's Landing, Waikato River – Photo: Tracey Burton, Toitū Te Whenua Land Information New Zealand



Top row: *Corbicula australis*

Bottom row: *Corbicula fluminea*

Photos credit: Jean-Claude Stahl and Kerry Walton, Te Papa



Top row: adult, sub-adult and juvenile
Corbicula australis

Bottom row: adult and sub-adult *Corbicula fluminea*.

Similar-looking species

Corbicula fluminea and *Corbicula australis* may look like native pea-clams or small freshwater mussels (kākahi/kāeo). The key features to look for when distinguishing freshwater clams from other clams are deep ribbing on the shell, the symmetrical shape of the shell and colour.

Smaller kākahi can have a similar golden colour and ridges but are more elongated and asymmetrical. Native pea-clams are pale, very small (generally less than 6 mm), more circular and without the ribbing of *Corbicula* clams.

Do not eat freshwater clams

Corbicula fluminea and *Corbicula australis* are filter-feeders and eat deposits from the river or lake bed. Because of this, they can accumulate toxins in their gut.

Help stop the spread – Check Clean Dry

You can help to stop the spread of *Corbicula fluminea* and *Corbicula australis* by making sure you “Check Clean Dry” any boating or other gear that has been in the water.

Check – for what is visible

Remove any visible matter, including any clams you can see, along with plant material or mud. Drain all river or lake water.

Wash down your gear, vehicle, watercraft, and trailer that has been in contact with river or lake water with tap-water onto grass, beside the original waterway or at home. The water you use for cleaning should not flow into a stormwater drain system.

For absorbent surfaces and materials that have been in contact with river or lake water (including carpet on trailers and lifejackets) use an appropriate treatment in the treatment options table (top right).

Treat residual water that always occurs when on-board ballast bladders or tanks have been pumped.

Dry – to be sure

Gear: Allow gear to dry to touch, inside and out, then leave it to dry for at least 48 hours (2 days) before using again.

Watercraft: Dry areas inside the watercraft where water has pooled, for example with an old towel, and then leave the craft to dry for at least 48 hours (2 days). The hull of a watercraft will dry when towed.

Note, these steps will also prevent the spread of other freshwater pest species.

Treatment options for gear made of absorbent material

Note: Refer to manufacturers’ instructions for any treatments on gear.

For more information, including any updates, visit: www.biosecurity.govt.nz/clam