

# Pāua:

## The Sensitive Snail

Pāua are ancient sea snails that haven't evolved since the time of the dinosaurs. Their blood and respiratory systems are very basic, and they breathe and reproduce through the row of small holes that runs along their shell.

Because pāua were once found in large numbers, people think the supply of this shellfish will last forever – but unfortunately, this isn't the case. They may be simple organisms, but pāua are easily stressed and injured. If threatened, their only form of defence is to clamp down, and it can take them several days to recover. During this time, movement is restricted, which makes feeding difficult and increases their vulnerability to predators.

The circulation system of a pāua is unique because its blood doesn't clot. This means it can bleed to death from the smallest cut. If a pāua does become injured, it tries to stop the bleeding by contracting the muscle around the wound. It requires a lot of energy to replace lost blood, increasing the stress on the shellfish even further.

It's obviously best for a pāua to avoid injuries altogether, so treat each one with



extreme care. This is especially important when taking pāua that may turn out to be undersized. Throwing the small ones back isn't enough. A pāua needs to be carefully handled if it's to survive back in the water. So, how can you make sure that this sensitive species has a chance? There are a few simple rules to follow:

### 1. Use a measuring gauge.

It's illegal to take black-footed pāua (the most common species found in New Zealand) that measure less than 125 mm, so always make sure you know the exact length before you take one. It's best to make your own measuring gauge so that you can check every time. And if you're not sure – leave it.

### 2. Always use the right kind of tool.

A thin plastic spatula that has no sharp edges is best. The spatula should be longer than the pāua and have a solid handle. This allows better leverage and grip.

### 3. Perfect your technique.

Slide the tip of your spatula underneath the pāua as smoothly and quickly as possible. Make sure the tool is well underneath the foot of the pāua and flat against the rock, otherwise you may damage the shellfish. If your first attempt is unsuccessful, leave it. Once a pāua clamps down, it's unlikely you'll get it off.

### 4. Treat undersized pāua with extreme care.

If you do make a mistake and take a small pāua, it can be saved – as long as you treat it carefully. Return the pāua straight away, holding it against a rock until it clamps down. Never throw a pāua back into the water. It may land upside down and will either be eaten by a predator or die of shock.



Common Name	Scientific Name	Size (grows up to)	Legal Size (for gathering)	Habitat	Predators
Black-footed pāua	<i>Haliotis iris</i>	180 mm	125 mm (ten only per day)*	Subtidal rocky coastlines at 1–15 m deep	Starfish, fish, crabs, octopuses, crayfish
Yellow-footed pāua	<i>Haliotis australis</i>	110 mm	80 mm (ten only per day)*		
White-footed pāua	<i>Haliotis virginea</i>	80 mm	Not commonly available		

\* With an accumulation limit of two days' worth of catches. This means a person can't have more than twenty pāua in their possession (including on their boat or in a fridge or freezer).

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**Pāua: The Sensitive Snail**

Pāua are ancient sea snails that haven't moved since the time of the dinosaurs. Their blood and respiratory systems are very basic, and they breathe and reproduce through the use of small tubes that run along their shell.

Because pāua were once found in large numbers, people think the supply of this shellfish will last forever – but unfortunately, this isn't the case. They may be simple organisms, but pāua are really stressed and injured. If harvested their only form of defence is to clamp down, and it can take them several days to recover. During this time, movement is restricted, which makes feeding difficult and increases their vulnerability to predators.

The circulation system of a pāua is unique because its blood doesn't clot. This means it can lead to death from the smallest cut. If a pāua does become injured, it tries to stop the bleeding by contracting the muscles around the wound. It requires a lot of energy to replace lost blood, increasing the stress on the shellfish even further.

It's absolutely best for a pāua to avoid anyone altogether, so treat each one with extreme care. This is especially important when taking pāua that may have had to be underwater. Turning the small snail back isn't enough. All pāua need to be carefully handled if it's to survive back in the water. So, how can you make sure that this sensitive species has a chance? There are a few simple rules to follow:

- 1. Use a measuring spoon.** It's legal to take black-footed pāua the most common species found in New Zealand that measure less than 125 mm, so always make sure you know the exact length before you take one. It's best to make your own measuring spoon so that you can check every time. And if you're not sure – leave it.
- 2. Always use the right kind of tool.** A flat plastic spatula that has no sharp edges is best. The spatula should be longer than the pāua and have a solid handle. This allows better leverage and grip.
- 3. Perfect your technique.** Slide the tip of your spatula underneath the pāua so something isn't going to be crushed. Make sure the tool is well underneath the foot of the pāua and flat against the rock, otherwise you may damage the shellfish. If you find it's impossible to move, leave it. Once a pāua clamps down, it's unlikely you'll get it off.
- 4. Treat underwater pāua with extreme care.** If you're moving a pāua and it has a small injury, it can be saved – as long as you treat it carefully. Return the pāua to a safe area, avoiding it against a rock until it clamps down. Leave a pāua back into the water. It may need several days and will either be eaten by a predator or die of shock.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Size (grows up to)	Legal Size (for gathering)	Habitat	Predators
Black-footed pāua	<i>Haliotis iris</i>	180 mm	125 mm (50 mm per day)	Subtidal rocks, corals, seaweeds at 1-25 m deep	Sea fish, seals, crabs, octopuses, starfish
Yellow-footed pāua	<i>Haliotis australis</i>	170 mm	80 mm (50 mm per day)	Subtidal rocks, corals, seaweeds at 1-25 m deep	Sea fish, seals, crabs, octopuses, starfish
White-footed pāua	<i>Haliotis argentea</i>	80 mm	Not commonly gathered	Subtidal rocks, corals, seaweeds at 1-25 m deep	Sea fish, seals, crabs, octopuses, starfish

\*Note: An uncommercially sized but still worth of gathering. This species is present but uncommon. It's best to leave pāua in their homes unless you have a special reason to take them.



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