

American Eel

Anguilla rostrata

STATUS

Threatened



Not Listed



Yellow Eel

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Species Description

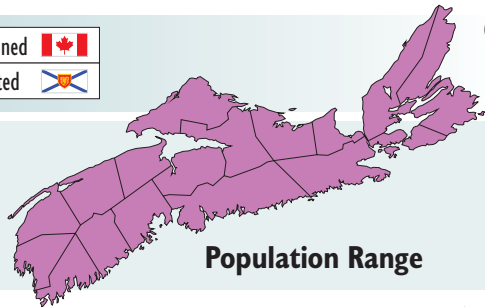
American Eels are long, slender, fish. Juveniles are small and transparent and known as glass eels. When they become pigmented they are known as elvers and are 5-7 cm in length. Elvers develop into yellow eels which have a dark-coloured back, a belly that is yellowish brown, and continuous dorsal and caudal fins. Males reach lengths up to 45 cm and females can reach lengths over 1 m. They have tough, thick skin that is protected by slippery mucus. After 9-22 years they become silver eels with white bellies, silvery sides and larger eyes and migrate to the Sargasso Sea to spawn.



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A wide-ranging species found in marine and freshwater habitats connected to the Atlantic Ocean from Greenland to northern South America.



Population Range

Habitat

American Eels use freshwater, coastal and marine environments during different stages of their lifecycle. They can be observed in coastal bays and estuaries (in waters that are shallow and protected), as well as in freshwater lakes, streams, and rivers. They are often in areas that are muddy and rocky with aquatic vegetation for cover. Adult eels often spend the day buried in sediment or hidden in vegetation and come out at night to feed. They overwinter in burrows in both freshwater and marine environments.



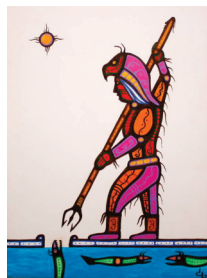
Freshwater lake



Coastal lagoon

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American Eels have a fascinating and complex lifecycle and can be found in a variety of coastal and freshwater environments.



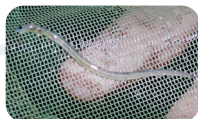
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Interesting Points

- American Eels (or “kat”) are culturally significant and a vital part of Mi'kmaq culture, used for food, medicine and in ceremonies. Eel skin is also traditionally used for many purposes (medicinal uses, binding, moccasins, etc.).
- American Eels have been fished using spears and stone weirs by the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia for over 4000 years.
- Their spawning area in the Sargasso Sea is unknown.



Leptocephalus
(flat, transparent larval stage)
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Glass Eel (transparent juvenile)
© PARKS CANADA



Elver (pigmented juvenile)
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Life Cycle



Silver Eel
(reproductive migratory eel)
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Yellow Eel (adult eel)
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Similar Species

Sea Lamprey:

Eel-like in appearance and also found in both freshwater and coastal ecosystems, but its mouth forms a disk (or sucker) containing circularly-arranged teeth.

Threats to Survival

- Dams (impediment of movements, mortality by turbines).
- Habitat degradation (poor land use practices that impact water quality and sedimentation).
- Fisheries for elvers, yellow and silver eels.
- Bioaccumulation of chemical contaminants.
- Introduced invasive species (including the swim bladder nematode).

How You Can Help

If you observe an American Eel, do not disturb it. Support projects that reduce mortality and barriers to movement (eel ladders, etc.). Get involved and lend a hand with Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation and help with monitoring and recovery efforts.



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Glass eels and elvers



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American Eel monitoring



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American Eel monitoring

Contacts, Information, Sighting Reports & Stewardship Opportunities

Contact: DFO Species at Risk 1-866-891-0771 or xmarsara@mar.dfo-mpo.gc.ca

Info: www.sararegistry.gc.ca, www.speciesatrisk.ca/eel

Sighting Reports: 1-866-727-3447 or www.speciesatrisk.ca/sightings

Stewardship: Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation: (902) 634-9977, www.coastalaction.org