

On a sunny September day, silver schools of fish swim in from the sea to sparkle and splash in the rivers. Upstream in shallower waters, an eel rests motionless alongside a fallen branch - pretending to be just another stick. In a flash, the eel strikes one of the small brownish fish that float in twos and threes along the river floor. The eel swallows down his prey and swims a sleek and sinuous lap before returning to his motionless watch.

American Eel

American eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) begin their long itinerant lives as transparent specks floating in the Sargasso Sea. Slowly they drift, feeding on plankton for several years.



As the young leaf-like eels grow longer and take on a true eel form, they become glass eels.

Glass Eels

Still transparent, but now eel-like in shape, they make their way to coastal waters

When they are about 4 inches long, they develop a grey to green-brown color.

Now they are elvers, and may still live in brackish coastal waters for a few years.



After some years of living inland (anywhere from 5-30), eels begin to change again. Their eyes grow bigger, their fattened bodies turn a silvery color, and they stop eating.

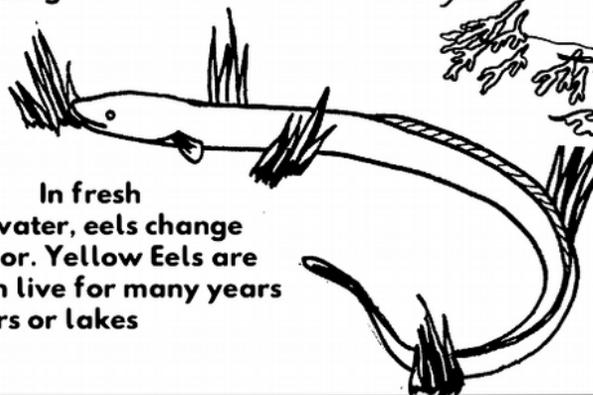
Silver Eels

The call of the ocean pulls them back and they swim for many days back to their spawning grounds. For eels from our coast, these grounds are in the Sargasso Sea. Their mating process is a mystery. One theory is that they spawn under the cover of darkness provided by a new moon.

*Eel, eel, swim to me
from the far
Sargasso Sea.
Eel, eel, return again
No one knows quite
where or when....*

Yellow Eels

In fresh water, eels change again to a yellowish color. Yellow Eels are young adults, and can live for many years in fresh water rivers or lakes



Elvers

At some point, most eels begin to migrate upstream to fresh water. Some even cross wet fields or slither through underground caves to get there.

The small fish of the world have been named by many and are known by many names. A light brown speckled or striped fish that hovers in place matching the current wriggle for ripple might be herring, dace, or young bass. The schools of silver fish that congregate in rivers in the spring and fall are Atlantic Menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) an oily filter feeding fish that many larger fish rely upon for food. Humans catch Menhaden to use for bait, and to make fish oil and pet food among other things.

