

Eel

Anguilla anguilla

Fish · Here all year · spawns in the Sargasso Sea



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A long, snake-like fish with a continuous fin running round the tail, tiny embedded scales and a thick coat of mucus. Colour changes with life stage: yellow-brown while growing in fresh water, then bright silver with enlarged eyes as it prepares to migrate. Eels live in the Nith, its tributaries, ditches and lochs, hiding by day under stones and among roots, and are critically endangered.

BEHAVIOUR

Eels are nocturnal predators, taking invertebrates, fish and carrion, and can cross wet grass to reach isolated ponds. They may spend anything from five to twenty years in fresh water before changing to the silver migratory form, when the gut degenerates and they stop feeding entirely. The full life cycle was one of the longest-standing mysteries in zoology — eel breeding has still never been directly observed in the wild.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Freshwater eels (Anguillidae)
SIZE	Females to 100 cm or more; males usually under 50 cm
UK STATUS	Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List

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