

River Lamprey

Lampetra fluviatilis

Fish · Runs the Nith in winter · spawns in spring



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An eel-shaped fish with no jaws, no paired fins and no scales, with seven circular gill openings behind each eye and a round sucker-like mouth ringed with horny teeth. Lampreys are survivors of an ancient lineage that predates jawed fishes entirely. River lampreys run the Nith from the Solway in autumn and winter to spawn the following spring, and the Solway rivers are important for the species.

BEHAVIOUR

Adults are parasitic at sea, attaching to herring, shad and other fish with the sucker and rasping through the skin to feed on blood and tissue. In fresh water they stop feeding and spawn in gravel, then die. The larvae — called ammocoetes — are blind and toothless and spend several years buried in silt beds filtering food, which is why soft, undisturbed river sediment matters as much to them as clean gravel.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Northern lampreys (Petromyzontidae)
SIZE	Typically 25–40 cm
UK STATUS	Protected; a qualifying feature of several Scottish river designations

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