

Sea Lamprey

Petromyzon marinus

Fish · Runs the Nith in late spring · spawns in summer



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Much larger than the river lamprey and unmistakable: a heavy, eel-shaped, jawless fish with a mottled olive-and-black marbled pattern, seven gill pores each side and a big sucker mouth lined with concentric rings of teeth. Sea lampreys enter the Nith from the Solway in late spring and spawn in early summer, and the sight of them building nests in shallow gravel is genuinely striking.

BEHAVIOUR

At sea the adults are parasites of large fish and even cetaceans, attaching with the sucker to feed. On entering fresh water they stop feeding, and pairs build a nest by lifting stones with the sucker to make a shallow depression in gravel — visible from the bank in low summer water — before spawning and dying. Larvae then spend years buried in silt as filter feeders before migrating to sea.

WHEN TO SEE IT

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QUICK FACTS

FAMILY	Northern lampreys (Petromyzontidae)
SIZE	Typically 60-90 cm · our largest lamprey
UK STATUS	Protected; a qualifying feature of several Scottish river designations

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