

European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*)

DESCRIPTION

The European Eel starts life in the Sargasso Sea as a tiny leaf-shaped larva, and then drifts on ocean currents and for 3,000 miles over 12 months until it reaches European shores. As elvers just a few inches long, they swim into rivers, inland to lakes and ponds, maturing for at least 7 years before making the return journey to the Sargasso seas to spawn and then die.



A mature eel about to be returned to the water

During their journeys to and from the spawning grounds they face the perils of climate change; changes in oceanic currents; disease and parasites; hydro and tidal power turbines; commercial exploitation of elvers, yellow and silver eels; changing hydrology; habitat loss; barriers to migration; pollutants and predation. The number of elvers returning to our shores is estimated to be 5% of the mean between 1960-1979.

The European Eel is currently listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) Red List as an endangered species.

CONSERVATION ACTION

Recent official advice by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea (ICES) to the EU is that whilst there has been a slight increase in glass eel recruitment, the status of stocks remains critical.

ICES advice is for all human-caused mortality (e.g. recreational and commercial fishing, hydropower, and pollution) to be reduced to as close to zero as possible until there is clear evidence of a continued increase in both recruitment and the adult stock.

In 2014, ICES stated that the numbers of glass eel (elver) are still far below the level for the eel stock size to be judged within safe biological limits. Urgent actions to help rebuild the stock are still needed.

The National Anguilla Club has worked to conserve the eel for the past 50 years, and promotes the safe return of all eels caught by recreational anglers in line with current Environment Agency bylaws.

The Environment Agency has produced 11 Eel Management Plans (EMPs), covering each of the River Basin Districts in England and Wales to address the causes of decline in eel populations and identify achievable management actions. The measures addressed in the 11 EMPs fall into five broad groups: improving eel passage; barriers to migration, monitoring, access to habitat, stocking, and regulating eel fishing.

CONTACT DETAILS

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