

Some 'Eely' Amazing Facts

- Eels are actually a type of fish
- They are **nocturnal**
- They are **carnivores** – eating **invertebrates** and smaller fish
- They can live up to 85 years
- They can weigh up to 5kg
- They are **critically endangered** – in the past 40 years eel numbers arriving in Europe have declined by over **90%**!
- They can grow up to 1.5m long but are usually about 80cm
- They can slither up to 400m over wet grass to get from one water habitat to another
- They are **Catadromous** – migrating from fresh water down the river into the sea's salt water to spawn
- We are still learning about eels



Photo: Silver eel by Jake Reeds EA

Eels and the Aldingbourne Rife

The main river in Bognor Regis is the Aldingbourne Rife, which is a chalk river, approximately 5.5 miles long (8.8km) and has many tributaries (streams and drains) flowing into it. The source is at Easthampnett/Norton, just south of the A27 at Crockerhill.

As in the rest of the UK, eel numbers in the Aldingbourne Rife are in decline.

Could you be a Aldingbourne Rife warden?

If you would like to volunteer to monitor the river in your area, raise awareness of this project in your community, and encourage ongoing maintenance & monitoring, we'd love to hear from you!

Please contact Sarah Hughes at aldingbourne@arrt.org.uk or Arun & Rother Rivers Trust – Part of a National Network of Rivers Trusts.

www.arrt.org.uk

Water, The Source of Life... Needs Our Protection

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The Amazing European Eel

The European Eel
(*Anguilla anguilla*)




Arun & Rother Rivers Trust

The European Eel has an incredible life cycle

No-one has ever witnessed the entire life cycle of the European eel, but this is what scientists believe to be true...

After spawning in the Sargasso Sea near Bermuda, the eel's eggs drift eastwards towards Europe with the Gulf Stream, taking up to two years to cover over 4,000 miles. During this time, the eggs hatch into transparent, leaf-shaped larvae, called leptocephalus. Fewer than one in every 500 larvae are thought to survive the journey.

Once the larvae get closer to Europe they metamorphose (change) into tiny little snake-shaped eels. Still almost transparent, these tiny fish are known as glass eels.

Once they arrive at the river estuaries and move upstream into the freshwater, the tiny glass eels darken in colour as pigmentation takes place. They are now known as elvers. They continue to migrate upstream and may even leave the main river and slither over wet grass to reach ponds or other freshwater streams.

Now they begin to grow into adults known as yellow eels and can stay in these habitats for more than 20 years, feeding on frogs, small fish, and invertebrates (worms and snails).

Once they are mature enough to reproduce (males take 6-12 years and females take 9-18 years), they turn into silver eels and swim downstream to begin their epic migration back across to the Sargasso Sea. It is this journey that the eel must make to enable it to spawn and complete its life cycle once it reaches the Sargasso Sea. It is then believed that the eels die after spawning (semelparity).

This migration usually occurs in the autumn. It's not yet fully understood how the eels find their way, but it's possible they can sense the Earth's magnetic field.

They can only contribute to their population once, even if they do successfully make it back to spawn.

Watch this brilliant YouTube video created by the Zoological Society of London to find out more about the eel's life cycle https://youtu.be/WBRnNk_uo9Y



How can we help?

One of the main issues for eels is man-made barriers which block their migratory routes. Conservation charities like the Rivers Trust are working closely with the Environment Agency and other organisations to remove barriers and where this is not possible, Eel Passes can be installed over/alongside weirs, dams or sluices which enable the elvers and other fish to pass upstream.

Providing vitally important habitat to support eels, this could be as simple as creating a junction pond (digging it deep, where two watercourses meet), providing native aquatic plants (non-invasive), submerged root systems, woody debris and boulders etc. that eels could use as refuges or ambush points.

Improve river water quality for eels, which would benefit all other creatures and plants that live in and around the river. Sadly, our rivers are often polluted with chemicals as well as litter.

Did you know that most of the drains you see in the roads take rainwater to our local rivers, unfortunately this means that anything else that goes down those drains also ends up in the same place and damages our environment (please see the Yellow Fish Campaign by the Environment Agency).

