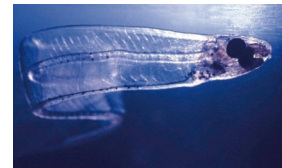


# The life cycle of an eel with Ely Museum

Eels are a 'catadromous' species: this means they spend most of their lives in freshwater but migrate to the sea to breed. It is thought that all European eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea. Eels can live up to a maximum of 85 years! They can also survive out of water for long periods. Sometimes they travel overland, wriggling from one stretch of water to another on rainy nights.

## Larvae or leptocephali

The common eel has a fascinating life-cycle. The larvae spawn in the Sargasso sea and are known as 'leptocephali'; they look like curled leaves and drift in the plankton for up to three years, before being carried by the Gulf Stream towards the coasts of Europe.



## Glass Eels

They then undergo metamorphosis into young eels; at this stage they are known as 'glass eels' because they are transparent.



## Elvers

They become darker in colour and start to migrate up freshwater streams in large numbers; they are known as 'elvers' at this time and measure around 50 mm in length.



## Yellow or brown eels

The eels, now called 'brown' or 'yellow eels' grow in fresh water with males and females spending 6 to 12 and 9 to 20 years in freshwater, respectively.



## Silver eels

Towards the end of this time, they become sexually mature; they turn a silvery colour and migrate back towards the sea on dark, moonless and stormy nights; during this time they are known as 'silver eels'. Upon returning to the sea, the eel lives in mud, crevices, and under stones. Spawning occurs during winter and early spring in the Sargasso Sea.

