

Five reasons to avoid eel

- Eel is critically endangered, 97% is gone
- Fishing is targeting the migratory eel, stopping its spawning
- Extensive illegal fishing, don't support it!
- Most eels contain high levels of toxic substances
- Again, this fish is critically endangered!

Read more at www.ccb.se/eel

The eel is endangered – but there is still time!

The European eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) is one of the world's most intriguing fish. Fossils suggest that eel has been around for over 70 million years, surviving the dinosaur era, several ice ages and other big climate changes, but now the eel is critically endangered.

The mystery

If there ever was a fish to be called mysterious, it must be the eel. Nobody has ever seen an eel spawn and we



don't know exactly where they do so. We don't know what makes them swim up freshwater rivers or what makes an eel turn into a male or female or how they find their way back to where they were born. The eel may quietly disappear in front of us without us knowing even the most basic facts about them.

A fishy situation

The European eel is listed as Critically Endangered (CR) on the IUCN Redlist and the main reason for this listing is that the stock has declined by 97%. There are still many eels out there but they are becoming increasingly lonely. The migrating fish we still catch and eat should remain in the water to rebuild the stock of this fantastic fish. We must at least give them a chance to embark on their marathon spawning migration.

The Baltic Sea region is of particular importance since most eels here grow into large females, crucial to the success of spawning. We cannot "farm" eels since we cannot unlock the secret of their spawning. All eels in aquaculture are actually caught as young eels and then raised in captivity.



What can you do?

- As an angler: handle all eel carefully and release it
- As a consumer: signal that you do not want to eat an endangered species!
- As a chef, restaurant owner or fish monger: consider alternatives or decide not to sell any eel at all. At least demand information of where and by whom eel is caught, to avoid selling illegally caught eel
- As a manager or decision-maker: protect the eel and increase the escapement from the Baltic Sea by stopping all fishing during migrations season and securing free migration routes.

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ccb.se/eel

Main threats against the eel

- Dams and hydropower turbines hinder migration and kill eels
- Illegal fishing
- Commercial and recreational fishing target eel migrating to spawning grounds
- High parasite load
- Strong vitamin B deficiency
- Destroyed and decreasing amount of suitable freshwater habitats

The epic story of eel

All European eels start their lives somewhere in the Sargasso Sea, north east of Cuba and Bermuda. After up to a few years as larvae the eels start swimming towards the coasts and rivers of Europe. Swimming up the rivers they can pass almost vertical barriers and even pass over land. They actually have the ability of absorbing oxygen through their skin to be able to survive the trip. The eel then live in fresh water or stay in coastal areas to grow.

Eels can become over 80 years old and change appearance several times during their lifetime. The final adult stage is called the silver eel stage and occurs during their final epic migration back to the Sargasso Sea where they were born. During this migration, the eels stop feeding and live off their fat reserves all the way to Sargasso. While travelling, they dive as deep as 1000 meters and move up again closer to the surface several times.

Once back in the Sargasso Sea, the eels spawn. We don't know exactly where, this mystery of the eel is still today not solved. We only know that they all seem to go back to this large sea area to reproduce. Recent scientific results suggests that eels migrate during a much longer period than previously thought and it seems they also spawn in batches and not all at the same time. This is a smart move considering the risk of failed spawning after such an amazing and long life story. The eel must survive predation, fishing, manmade dams, hydropower turbines, destroyed habitats and pollution before ever reaching its native home.

The remarkable story of eels also contains many strange elements and unknown parts. For example the blood of the eel is toxic, causing lethal cramping of muscles including the heart. The reason that eel can still be consumed is that the toxic protein is destroyed when cooked.

Eel facts

Eel is an endangered species! We must stop killing and eating it!

The result of reproduction of eel is down to record low numbers, a drop of 97% in only a few eel generations.

Leading scientists have called for a complete ban on killing eel for at least 10 years.

The eel requires international cooperation all the way from Sargasso Sea to the rivers of the Baltic region to survive human impacts.

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Where were you and what were you doing 20 years ago?

The fact that eels grow old and all eels come from one single stock makes managing it difficult. If we are doing the right things or not is hard to see locally, since one eel saved here may eventually result in 100 young eels somewhere else. Also since the adult eels we find here now can be born as long as 20-30 years ago they are not the result of actions we may take now and only in several years will we know if things are getting better or worse. The eel truly represents long term thinking in managing our environment and it connects our Baltic region with the world oceans. What happens in Sargasso will affect the eels here and vice versa. This underlines the importance of also protecting the only European eel spawning ground on the planet.



Coalition Clean Baltic