



### **79. EEL / AAL (*Anguilla anguilla*)**

**IDENTIFICATION:** The eel has a very elongated, almost snakelike body with a dorsal fin originating far behind the pectorals. A pointed snout and a large mouth extend behind the eye. The dorsal, tail, and anal fins grow together and constitute a uniform margin. The eel has no pelvic fins. Scales are small, elliptical, and hidden in thick slimy skin. The back may be dark gray, dark brown, or olive; the belly is yellow or green (for the yellow eel and green eel respectively) and turns dirty white or silver shortly before the migration run.

#### **BLOOD OF EEL IS POISONOUS:**

**HABITAT:** The eel lives in moderate temperature sections of streams and lakes with soft muddy bottoms. It is a nocturnal feeder and hides during the day in the muddy bottom with only a portion of its head visible.

**FOOD:** Flat-head eel is omnivorous; pointed-head eel feeds primarily on small aquatic animals.

**SPAWNING:** Eels are catadromous fish, living in fresh water but spawning in the sea. European eels spawn in the Sargasso Sea, a southwestern part of the North Atlantic Ocean levels reportedly as deep as 1,000 feet. The eggs hatch near the surface. Young eels (leptocephalus) are ribbon like and transparent. They change to a more eel-like form (elver) after a year. During the development stages, as leptocephalus and elver, eels drift with the Gulf Stream current. It takes eels 3 years to travel from their birthplace to the European streams and lakes; Eels may cover as much as 5,000 miles during the journey. Eels stay about 12 years in the fresh water of Europe, the return to their birth, and spawning place. Eels apparently die after their initial spawning act.