

# American eel

## *Anguilla rostrata*

Kingdom: Animalia  
Phylum: Chordata  
Class: Actinopterygii  
Order: Anguilliformes  
Family: Anguillidae

### ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

### FEATURES

The American eel grows to a maximum length of 60 inches. Its average size is two and one-half pounds in weight and 16 to 33 inches in length. The female is larger than the male. The body is snakelike with no pelvic fins. The dorsal fin covers more than half the length of the body and is connected to the tail fin which in turn connects to the anal fin. The head is pointed, and the lower jaw extends beyond the upper jaw. The body is yellow or brown on the back and sides with a yellow or white belly. The scales are tiny.

### BEHAVIORS

American eel adults spend five to 20 years in fresh water before migrating to the sea to breed. Males tend to stay near the coast, while females swim far inland until their movement is blocked by a dam or other object. Any eel found naturally in Illinois is a female. The eggs are laid in the Sargasso Sea of the Atlantic Ocean near Cuba. Larval eels live in the ocean for about a year before transforming to the elver stage and traveling to fresh water.

### ILLINOIS RANGE



© Illinois Department of Natural Resources. 2020. *Biodiversity of Illinois*.

Unless otherwise noted, photos and images © Illinois Department of Natural Resources.



## **Aquatic Habitats**

rivers and streams

## **Woodland Habitats**

none

## **Prairie and Edge Habitats**

none