

Asian Swamp Eel

Monopterus sp.

Order: Synbranchiformes

Family: Synbranchidae

Description: Asian swamp eels are often confused with a number of native animals, including the native American eel. The swamp eel has an elongate (snake-like) body with no noticeable scales or fins. The head is relatively short and the teeth are small and not easily seen. The body and head are dark, sometimes dark olive or brown above, but lighter, often light orange below. Some individuals are brightly colored with yellow, black, and gold spots over a light tan or almost-white background.

Special Features:

- **Skin** – The skin produces a thick mucous layer making the eels difficult to catch and hold.
- **Breathing** - They breathe air and can achieve up to 25% of respiration cutaneously (through the skin).
- **Food Needs** – They can survive for weeks without food.
- **Male or Female?** – The swamp eel changes from female to male as it grows older and larger. Therefore, all larger individuals are males.
- **Parental Care** - Large males construct bubble nests at the mouth of burrows and guard the eggs and young. A high degree of parental care is given probably assuring greater reproductive success.

Similar Species: The swamp eel introduced to the United States belongs to the genus *Monopterus*. There may be more than one species. Until recently scientists have used the name *Monopterus albus* for all U.S. populations.

Range and Habitat: They are native to tropical and temperate parts of Central and South America, Africa, Australia, and from India to eastern Asia (including much of China). In Asia, swamp eels are widespread

and commonly sold live in markets as food for human consumption.

Wild Diet: Crayfish, shrimp, worms, frogs, tadpoles, and other fishes

Reproduction: Eggs are laid into a bubble nest in shallow water. The nest is typically not attached to vegetation but floats freely at the surface. Eggs and young are guarded by one or both parents.

Notes:

- **Common Names** - In addition to the name "swamp eel," other English names used for members of this group of fish include rice eel, rice-paddy eel and belut.
- **What is it?** – Although swamp eels are fish, they are not closely related to other snake-like fishes. Unlike the native American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*), swamp eels do not migrate to the ocean to spawn. More than a dozen species are included in the eel family.
- **Invasion** - Swamp eels were first introduced to the United States in Hawaii some time around 1900. It was first identified in the continental United States in 1994 based on specimens collected in ponds at the Chattahoochee Nature Center north of Atlanta, Georgia. The eels were first found in Florida in 1997.
- **Ecology** – At present, scientists say that swamp eels have already had a profound effect on native fish in Georgia. This makes Florida biologists very aware of the harmful impact they could have here.