



Recommendation to Members - Use of Freshwater Eels as Bait

Introduction

Today predator anglers have a wider choice than ever before of both sea and freshwater species of fish to use as bait. Historically the European Eel (*Anguilla anguilla*) has been one of the options available. However, the eel is now officially listed BY CITIES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora) as a 'critically endangered species' and, on that basis we wish to discourage their continued use as bait.

The European Eel (*Anguilla Anguilla*)...

The life cycle of the European Eel is particularly fascinating. Spawning takes place in the Sargasso Sea in the middle of the North Atlantic Ocean some 6,000 km. away. The young elvers are carried to our shores by the Gulf Stream in a journey that takes 3 years. The elvers then mature in freshwater, moving through our river systems, streams, ditches, and drains; some eventually finding their way into still waters.

The journey of the European Eel is a perilous one as they are a source of food for predatory fish, birds and mammals. They are also considered a delicacy in certain parts of the world and many are trapped and exported to meet the demand for human consumption. As a consequence only a small proportion of eels survive to reach maturity in freshwater.

Those eels that avoid capture and are able to grow on in freshwater may stay in our lakes and rivers for many decades. The oldest recorded eel reached a remarkable 84 years of age, whilst an eel weighing 3 lbs. may be as much as 30 years old. Such fish are becoming increasingly rare, and deserve care and respect from anglers.

Upon maturity, and given the opportunity, the adult eel once again undertakes the epic journey back to the Sargasso Sea where it spawns and then dies.

Eel population, the facts...

The Environment Agency has carried out surveys of fish stocks in England and Wales for many years but, as eels were once considered plentiful, they were not included in the surveys. As a consequence, accurate figures for their numbers are not available. However, there has clearly been a massive decline in the eel population, not just here but throughout Europe, and stocks are thought to be as low as 5% of average levels in the 1970s.

Over the last 30 years environmental change is believed to have affected the number of elvers arriving from the Atlantic, and further damage has resulted from stocks then being over-exploited for commercial gain. The rapidly declining population has then been under increasing pressure from other sources, including the destruction of habitat and the creation of barriers to the passage of fish throughout river systems.

Legalities...

England & Wales

The Environment Agency recently introduced a new Fisheries Byelaw which makes it an offence to remove fish over certain sizes from a river. The same byelaw gives protection to the European Eel. It states:

You must return any eel (*Anguilla anguilla**)...you catch from any water in England and Wales. This includes estuaries and inshore waters, to a distance of six nautical miles.

*Does not include Conger Eel (*Conger conger*).

Recommendation to members...

Eels which are sold as deadbaits for predator fishing are casualties of commercial fishing and the licensed export process. All things considered we believe that commercial fishing for eels is not sustainable and would recommend that members do not support this by continuing to buy or use eels as bait.

We would also ask you to consider an alternative to eels as bait when fishing abroad, although the use of eels as bait is prohibited in parts of France and Spain.

In helping to take a lead on this issue it is hoped that this recommendation will have a positive influence upon the wider angling community and help to play a part in relieving pressure upon eel stocks.

Please support this recommendation. Just like the Catfish, the eel should be valued as a sporting fish, to be admired and then returned to fight another day.

CCG Committee, April 2013



