

Asian Swamp Eel Fact Sheet

Genus, species: *Monopterus albus* (Zuiew 1793).

Common Names: Asian swamp eel, rice eel, rice-paddy eel, belut, white ricefield eel, yellow eel

Taxonomic Synonyms: *Fluta alba* (Bloch and Schneider 1801).

The Asian swamp eel is not a true eel, that it is not of the Anguillidae family to which the American, European, and Japanese eels belong, but is instead a member of the fish family, Synbranchidae. Asian swamp eels have become established in a few areas in the southeastern United States, and have the potential to spread unchecked through the southern United States because of their lack of natural predators in the United States.

Life History: Swamp eels are nocturnal predators. Eggs are laid in a free-floating nest in shallow water. Males often guard the nest and young eels (ISSG 2005; GSMFC 2003).

Means and Time of Introduction: It is believed that swamp eels were first brought to Hawaii around 1900. In the early 1990s, the eel was first found in Florida and Georgia. Today, three distinct populations in Florida have been identified. The eels probably were brought over as food fish or to start a fish farm, and then somehow were released or escaped into the wild (Hamilton 2006).

Origin: The swamp eel comes from Southeast Asia, and may or may not be also native to Northern Australia. The eel thrives in tropical and temperate freshwater areas (Hamilton 2006). It has also found in Central and South America, and Africa (ISSG 2005; Bricking 2002).

North American Distribution: Asian swamp eels have been found in several freshwater bodies in Hawaii, Florida, and Georgia (Hamilton 2006).

Habitat: The ideal habitat for Asian swamp eels is tropical and temperate freshwater systems. However, the swamp eel has a relatively high tolerance for temperature change, and thus has the potential to spread across a large portion of the Southern United States (Hamilton 2006). Agricultural areas, wetlands, muddy ponds, canals, swamps, and rice fields all provide suitable habitats. By burrowing in moist ground, the swamp eel can survive for long periods without water (ISSG 2005; Bricking 2002). They are found typically from 34 °N to 6 °S (FishBase 2006).

Ecological Impacts: Asian swamp eels currently have no known predators in North America, therefore growth has the potential to go unchecked. Swamp eels are known to eat worms, frogs, tadpoles, shrimp, crayfish, and other fishes (Hamilton 2006).

Economic Impacts: The Asian swamp eel is commonly used as a food fish (Hamilton 2006). Asian and specifically Chinese immigrants are the main consumers of swamp eels as food fish (ISSG 2005).

Special Notes: Swamp eels may grow as large as 3-4 feet long and grow to weigh as much as a pound. Body colors range from olive to brown and occasionally light orange on the bottom. Some yellow, black, and gold spots have also been reported on various samples. Swamp eels can breath air and can travel on land if moist. Individuals can also survive for weeks with out food (Hamilton 2006).

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