

## NONINDIGENOUS SPECIES INFORMATION BULLETIN

### ASIAN SWAMP EEL (Family: Synbranchidae, Genus: *Monopterus*)



**COMMON NAMES:** Asian swamp eel, Asian rice eel, rice eel, rice swamp eel, rice paddy eel, belut.

**IDENTIFICATION:** Swamp eels are elongate, snake-like fish, growing up to 1 meter (about 3 feet) long and 1 kilo (about 2 pounds). Most species have no noticeable scales or fins. The head is short; eyes are small; and the teeth are small, conical, and not easily seen. Among swamp eels introduced to the United States, the external gill opening forms a V-shape on the lower throat. Coloration is generally olive-brown or brown above, but lighter, sometimes orange or yellow, below. Some are brightly colored, covered with black, yellow, and gold spots over a light tan or almost white background. Probably more than one species is established in the United States, all tentatively assigned to the Asian genus *Monopterus*. Swamp eels may be confused with several native fishes and salamanders (see illustrations on back).



**NATIVE RANGE:** Members of the genus *Monopterus* occur in eastern and southern Asia, including tropical and temperate climates.

#### KNOWN NONINDIGENOUS OCCURRENCES:

Four populations are established in the southeastern United States. Three of these are in **Florida**, one near Tampa, and two in the southeastern part of the state. Another population is in **Georgia** near Atlanta. Introduced populations also are established in **Hawaii**.

**MEANS OF INTRODUCTION:** Largely unknown: may have resulted from aquarium releases, live fish food markets, unauthorized stockings as food fish, escapes from fish farms, or a combination of these methods.

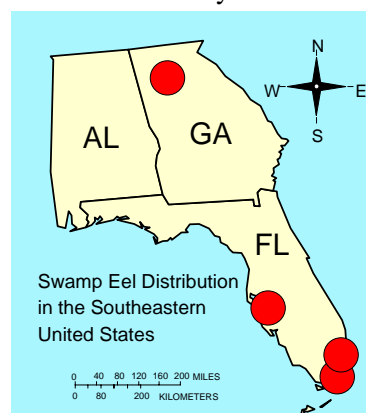
**HABITAT:** Swamp eels typically inhabit vegetated areas in shallow waters, including marshes, swamps, canals, streams, ditches, lakes, ponds, and rice paddies.

They generally occur in fresh water, but in their native range some swamp eel species inhabit brackish-coastal water systems. These fish often burrow into soft substrates.

**IMPACTS:** Swamp eels are predators that feed on small fish, frogs, tadpoles, and invertebrates including crayfish, shrimp, aquatic insects, and worms. Many swamp eels are air breathers and some are capable of traveling over land. Consequently, there is potential that they may invade a variety of wetland habitats, disrupt food webs, and prey on native aquatic animals and compete with fish and wading birds for food.



**CONTACTS:** If you have information on the capture or



the sighting of a swamp eel, contact Dr. Leo Nico or fill out the NAS form at our web site.\* Do not transport or release live eels. Please photograph the animal so that its identification can be confirmed. Do not confuse with native species.

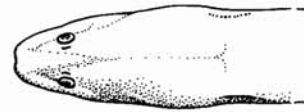
Prepared by Leo G. Nico <email: LNico@usgs.gov>  
United States Geological Survey,  
Florida Integrated Science Center,  
7920 NW 71<sup>st</sup> Street, Gainesville, Florida 32653  
\* <http://nas.er.usgs.gov/SightingReport.asp>.

**SUGGESTED CITATION:** Nico, L. G. 2009. Asian swamp eel (family: Synbranchidae; genus: *Monopterus*). U.S. Geological Survey Nonindigenous Species Information Bulletin. **Revision 18 March 2009**

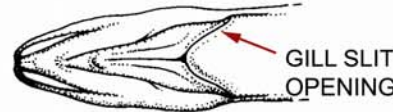
**NONINDIGENOUS SPECIES:**

**Asian Swamp Eel**  
*(*Monopterus species*)*

SNAKE-LIKE BODY  
NO OBVIOUS FINS  
V-SHAPED GILL OPENING  
MAXIMUM SIZE: 1 METER (ABOUT 3 FEET)



TOP OF HEAD



UNDERSIDE OF HEAD

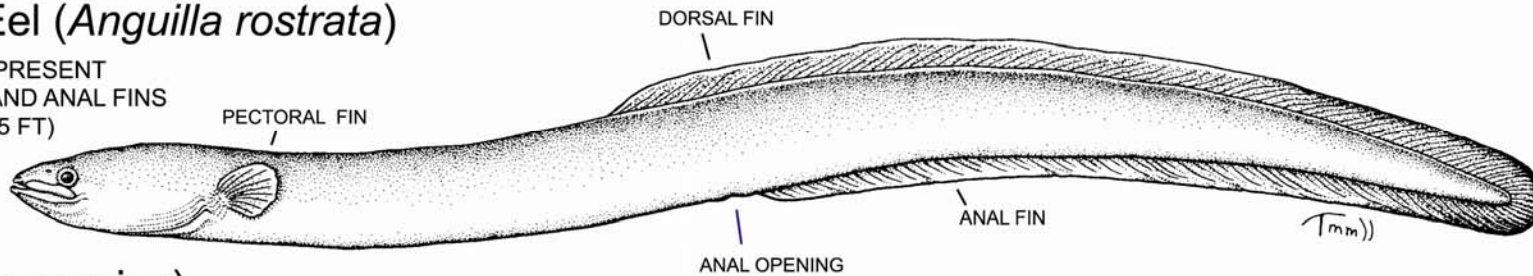


**NATIVE FISH & SALAMANDERS:**

**DO NOT CONFUSE SWAMP EELS WITH NATIVE SPECIES**

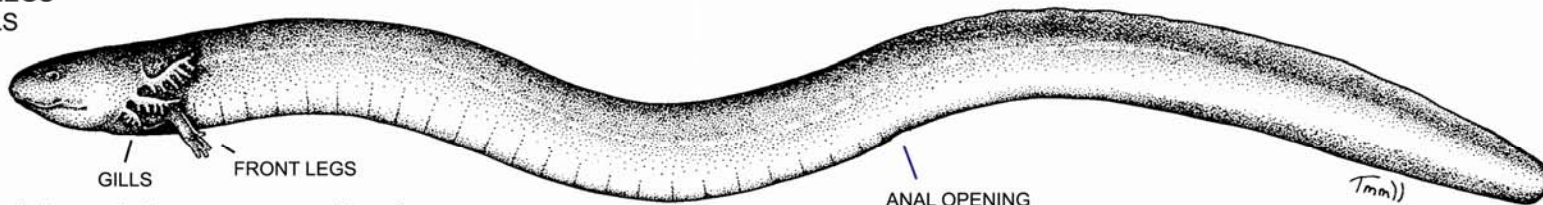
**American Eel (*Anguilla rostrata*)**

PECTORAL FIN PRESENT  
LONG DORSAL AND ANAL FINS  
SIZE TO 1.5 M (~5 FT)



**Siren (*Siren species*)**

SMALL FRONT LEGS  
EXTERNAL GILLS  
SIZE TO 98 CM  
(39 INCHES)



**Amphiuma (*Amphiuma species*)**

TINY FRONT AND HIND LEGS  
SIZE TO 116 CM  
(46 INCHES)

