

# AMERICAN EEL

(*Anguilla rostrata*)

Oneida Lake Status:  
Rare



An American eel in the wild:

<http://www.kentuckyawake.org/files/images/plantsWildlife/americanEel.jpg>



Unlike some snakelike fish, the American eel has an obvious jaw:

<http://www.fisheries.vims.edu/trawlseine/images/AmEelFaceYellowBackgrounddsm.jpg>



Drawing of the American eel

- Dominant Oneida Lake fish predator in 1800's
- Currently rare in Oneida Lake
- Important food source for Native Americans

Though the American eel is rare on Oneida Lake, many people could identify this fish if they came across one. The American eel's slender, snakelike body makes it hard to confuse with other fish. They are bronze in color with a yellow belly, and on Oneida Lake, eels can reach a length of 40 inches and weigh up to 7 pounds. Identification can be confirmed by knowing that eels have: jaws, single gill slits, and no pectoral fins.

Historical records show that Oneida Lake once provided Native Americans with American eels, which were the dominant fish predator here at the time. The American eel was a major food source for the Iroquois, and they used weirs to trap eels leaving



The American eel is easily identified by its snakelike appearance

Oneida Lake to spawn in the ocean. The Iroquois also speared eels at night using torch-lit canoes. This all changed by the early 20th century.

The American eel is an important commercial fish in New York State. While they don't attract tourist dollars, eels are valuable as an export to Europe and Japan where they are often smoked, jellied, or cooked in olive oil and vinegar. Eels were abundant in Oneida Lake 100 years ago, but have declined and are now rarely seen. Additionally, many of the prime fishing areas for eel in the region have been closed due to high PCB levels.

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January 2007