

Aquaculture: Raising Mysterious And Misunderstood Eels Is Discussed

by Johnny Foster
Eels are my favorite fish. They are mysterious and misunderstood. Are you surprised to learn that eels are one of the most valuable fish in the world? The Japanese even have a holiday from work each summer to eat eel in order to give them strength for the hot summer. I even feel eels have personality.

I have been an eel farmer now for almost eight years. Perhaps I like eels because they are most familiar to me. The more I learn about them, the more interesting they become. Maybe I like eels because farm-raised eels sell for at least \$5.00 per pound in Europe and Japan. Yeah, I think that's why I like them.

Eels are extraordinary fish. They cannot be bred in captivity yet. All freshwater eels in Europe and North America spawn in the Sargasso Sea, out in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Eel culture must begin by capturing the baby eels, called elvers, as they are migrating inland.

In North Carolina elvers enter our streams from the ocean in the late winter. The migration seems to be stimulated by freshwater runoff, gradually increasing temperatures and dark nights. The first hour after dark on a cloudy night or night of a new moon in January, February or March is a good time to look for elvers. Good locations are anywhere fresh water is flowing into salty or brackish water. Look closely though. They might be transparent, and 4,000 eels at that stage only weigh one pound.

Eels are remarkably adaptable. They can live almost anywhere. Aristotle thought eels grew from horsehairs that had fallen into the mud. Usually male eels live in brackish water and remain small. Females usually live in fresh water and get much larger. All eels can live for a little while out of water if their skin stays moist and cool.

Best cultured in warm water, eels grow fastest at about 78 degrees F (25 degrees C). They can withstand cold water; they just won't grow. I have even heard several stories about eels being frozen in a solid

block of ice. When the ice melted, the eels swam away.

Eels are slow growing in nature. Most of the eels in North Carolina's rivers live for seven to 25 years before they migrate back to the Sargasso Sea to spawn. One eel kept in an aquarium in Sweden lived for 88 years before it died from neglect.

But, farmed eels can be grown much quicker. Fast growers can be eating size in two years in North Carolina. If the temperature is maintained near optimum, eels are marketable in about one year. Since baby eels must be harvested from the wild, many are slow growers. Therefore, about half of the elvers can be raised. They would not be profitable to culture.

Eels are also very versatile. They are truly delicious to eat. Anyone who likes smoked fish would love smoked eel. Eel is also enjoyed fried, broiled and barbecued. My favorite is baked eel in olive oil and garlic.

Eels also make a fantastic bait. Different sizes can be used to catch largemouth bass, cobia, drum, sea trout and flounder among many others. Many fishermen believe the ever-popular plastic worms simply imitate an eel. And, last year the world-record striped bass was caught on a live eel.

But there's more. I know an eel farmer in Florida who sells many of his smaller eels to tropical fish stores. They are a nice addition to a home aquarium. And eel skin leather is now being used to make fine wallets, briefcases, and cowboy boots.

In addition to all this, eels are extremely friendly critters. They don't even bite. Their teeth are tiny anyway. They seem to enjoy touching each other. When resting in tanks and ponds, they will all accumulate together in a mass. At feeding time, they come up to the feeder. If I stick my hand in the water, thousands of eels will swirl around it.

Eels are fascinating fish. It's a shame people are so afraid of them because they resemble a snake. I'll discuss eel culture techniques in a future column. Please write to me

if you would like additional information. NCSU Aquaculture Demonstration Project, Route 2, Box 305, Aurora, NC 27806, (919) 322-4054.

Applying For Social Security

Lee E. Wallie
Field Representative

People who plan to apply for Social Security monthly retirement, survivor, or disability benefits can help speed the process if they are well prepared at the time they apply.

Social Security applications are designed to obtain information about the worker, spouse, children, work history, and military service.

Applications for disability benefits also obtain information about the person's disabling condition. Certain documents are needed to support a claim.

Only original documents or copies certified by the issuing agency can be used.

Some or all of the following documents may be required in a particular case: - Birth Certificate, - Proof of Military Service, - W-2 Forms or Self-Employment Tax Returns for the past 2 years, - Proof of Marriage, - Proof of Divorce, - Children's Birth Certificates, - Death Certificate (if applying for survivor benefits).

Anyone applying for disability benefits should also have information about their sources of medical treatment.

A person should not delay applying for benefits because he does not have all the required documents.

The Elizabeth City Social Security office staff may be able to suggest alternative documents.

Where possible, a person should apply 2 or 3 months before he wants benefits to begin.

This will allow plenty of time to process the claim so that checks will start timely.

You do not have to visit the Social Security office to apply; you can apply by telephone.

You can get Social Security information by calling the Elizabeth City Social Security office at 338-2161.

Thomas C. Phillips of Edenton was one of the alumni volunteers who helped the N.C. State University Alumni Association raise more than \$500,000 in contributions during the association's fiscal year just ended.

Phillips served as NCSU Alumni Loyalty Fund Chairman for Chowan County during the 1981-82 fund campaign.

According to Edwin P. Bounous of Morganton, 1981-82 President of the NCSU Alumni Association, 1981-82 marked the first time alumni contributions to the association have exceeded one-half million dollars. Bounous also noted that for the first time membership in the NCSU Alumni Association exceeds 11,000.

Charles T. Lambert of Virginia Beach, Va., national chairman of the 1981-82 NCSU Alumni Loyalty Fund Campaign, reported that strong efforts

by Chowan and other alumni volunteers throughout North Carolina and across the nation resulted in 11,465 alumni and friends contributing \$530,473 during the year.

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Hama

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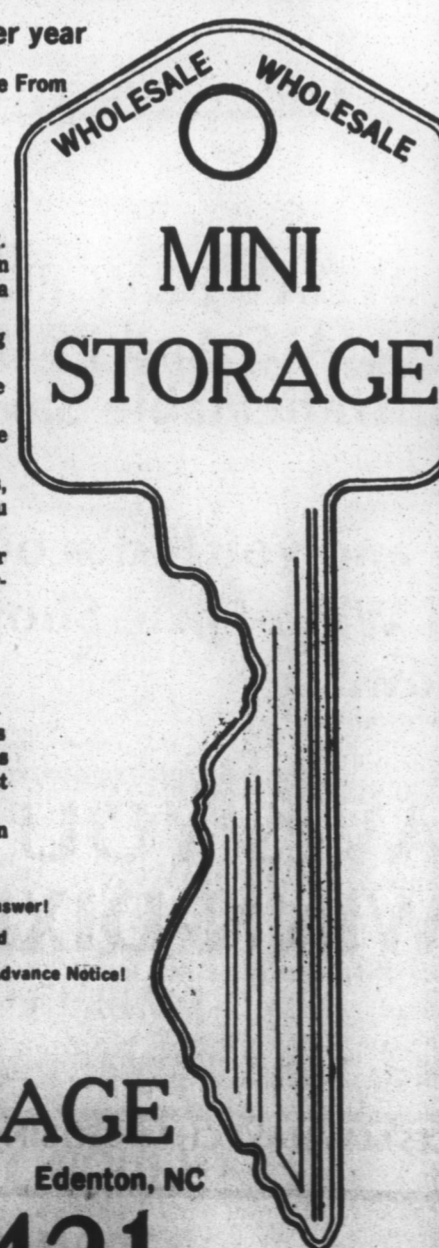
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