

51. ウナギの生態(2)：構造理解

For centuries, the life cycle of the eel was a mystery. In the Middle Ages, it was believed that eels were born spontaneously from the mud in which they spent so much of their time. Another theory was that in May or June dew falling on the river banks was turned by the sun's heat into the baby eels, called elvers, which can sometimes be seen heaped up on the grass by the river. It was not until fairly recently that the mystery was solved.

For most of its life, the eel remains in the fresh water of lakes, ponds and streams, feeding and growing steadily larger. It may reach a maximum size of about 1.4 metres in length, and a weight of 8 kilograms, depending on the temperature of the water and the amount of food available. The female will spend from 8 to 20 years in this condition, and the male from 6 to 12 years. During this stage it is called a yellow eel, because of the yellowish-brown colour of its skin.
