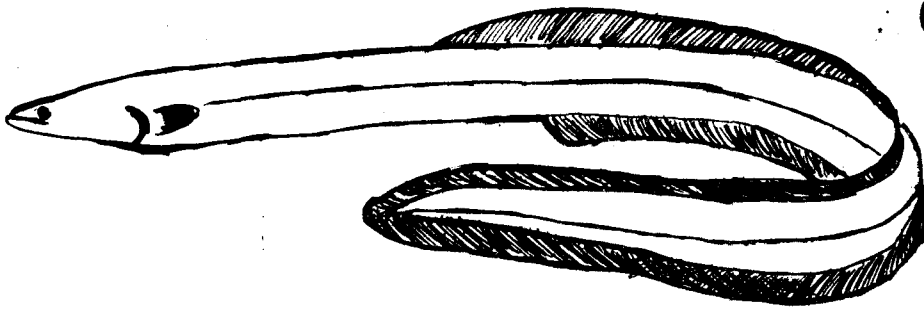


anguilla



by
ROBERT T. ROSEN

There are many reasons for keeping a certain native or tropical fish, whether it be for beauty, uniqueness in spawning, or just because only a few others have done so. The latter, along with a certain fascination was my initial reason for bringing home a pair of American eels.

First no one in their right mind would want to keep a four foot long giant predator in an aquarium unless he could dedicate a very large aquarium and a tremendous amount of food to just one fish. My two were three inch long babies, perhaps just arrived from their three year trek from Sargasso. Netting eels along the eastern seaboard is as easy as taking a seine to the shore and spending a few hours time. American eels are one of the many types of saltwater species easily adaptable to the freshwater aquarium.

In the months to follow I found out that they were the most unusual fish I have kept.

After a slow change to freshwater, I introduced them into a ten gallon tank which was also occupied by a few small pumpkinseeds and Blue gills. The sunfish thought the eels were worms and the chase was on. Only for a minute though, for when the eels were tired, they dove beneath the gravel as if it were fluid. In a few days, everything was peaceful and while feeding on live adult brine shrimp I learned lesson number two. Eels are almost blind and the tip of their nose acts as do the barbels of catfish in finding food. In addition, they were nocturnal and slept beneath the gravel until feeding time or until dark when they explored each corner and niche of the aquarium. A week went by and one morning I was heartbroken to find that one, on exploring, had found an opening in the hood and ended up dried out on the floor. Luckily I put the stiff body back in some water — and learned another lesson. Eels have a desire for life un-equalled among fish. As soon as the eel was back in the water, it began wriggling furiously. A dried eel may need to have its gill slits rubbed gently to remove the dried slime, or may need tender loving care while it recuperates and regenerates its protective coating.

The eels were growing....when they were eight inches long I moved them to a twenty gallon aquarium. I should have lowered the water level at least one-third of the way because the move had scared them and they both jumped out that night. I found them on the floor the next morning. The next time I moved them I lowered the water level.

Feeding had become a problem as the eels grew because so did their appetites. Food lay on and under the gravel and the water clouded. I solved this problem by feeding the eels chunks of freeze-dried brine shrimp which I held in my hand and touched to their noses. They wouldn't bite my fingers and withdrew quickly if they accidentally gave me a nip. At twelve inches, their appetites were voracious and they were constantly hungry. By the time they reached 15 inches the amount of waste material they left in the gravel was unbearable. The aquarium constantly smelled. Winter was only a few months away, so I decided to return them to a river that led to the sea. As I look back, observation of the American eels in an Aquarium was fascinating.