

Additional Notes on the History of American Eels (*Anguilla rostrata*) in the Upper Midwest

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I recently reviewed historical records of the American Eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) in the Upper Midwest (Cochran, 2006). Surveying the historical record for mentions of fish is much like sampling fish in real life. Many get away! The purpose of this note is to provide additional records that have come to my attention since my initial review appeared. As in Cochran (2006), some of the accounts presented below were obtained during a survey of newspapers on microfilm for historical records of Lake Sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) in the Lake Michigan basin. This survey concentrated on newspapers published in the latter half of the 1800s and early 1900s in Wisconsin and Michigan cities located on tributaries to Lake Michigan. The accounts are quoted verbatim, with punctuation and other typographical errors left as is.

19th-Century Michigan

Ballard (1948), in a history of Niles, Michigan, embedded the following statement in a series of quotes from newspaper accounts about fish and fishing (it appeared between quotes from 1853 and 1855):

Sometimes the mill wheel at the Dakota mills became so clogged with eels, that it would be stopped and this, considering that eels propagate so far off in the Atlantic ocean, near the Sargasso sea, and must make a trip of thousands of miles in order that they may clog the mill wheel at Niles, Mich., is some story.

Niles is located on the St. Joseph River, a tributary to Lake Michigan. Ballard (1948) understood the length of the migra-

tion necessary for eels to get to Niles from their spawning grounds, information that would not have been available to 19th-century observers. However, he did not note that eels in the 1850s would probably had to have used artificial connections to get into the upper Great Lakes (see Cochran [2006] for a review of these connections). If eels did indeed occur in Niles in the 1850s, as implied by Ballard's positioning of this anecdote, their occurrence would not be explained by reported dates of stocking. Hubbs and Lagler (1964) noted that eels were stocked into Michigan waters from 1877 to 1891. Indeed, the first state fish hatchery in Michigan was operated on the Dowagiac River, a tributary to the St. Joseph, from 1873 to 1881, and American Eel were among the fish species raised at this location (Wesley and Duffy, 2003). However they got to the Dakota mills, the great number of eels implied by Ballard's (1948) story is surprising.

19th-Century Wisconsin

Daily Wisconsin (May 21, 1860): "CATCHING FISH BY BARRELS FULL. - Jesse Babcock, a fisherman in Jefferson county, has taken in a single net, in one night, six hundred and fifty three pike, plus a host of eels, suckers, and other fish not generally counted. He also informs us that he has averaged for two weeks in succession, four hundred fish nightly, their average weight being two and a half pounds weight. - *Jeffersonian*, at *Jefferson*." [Rock River, Mississippi River drainage, Jefferson County]

This record provides evidence that eels historically occurred relatively high in the Rock River drainage. McNaught



Fig. 1.

An American Eel (*Anguilla rostrata*) mounted on the wall of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Black River Falls Service Center in Black River Falls, Jackson County, Wisconsin. As noted by Cochran (2006), eels are enough of a novelty in the Upper Midwest that any specimen captured by an angler is likely to win a date with a taxidermist. A framed label below the specimen reads: "American Eel / Caught by hook and line in the Black River, below Black River Falls, in June 1987. Adult eels leave fresh water and travel to the Sargasso Sea to spawn, then die. After one year the young migrate to fresh water again [sic] to mature as adults. This eel is over eleven years old. / Eels are taken commercially in the Mississippi River." Photograph by Phil Cochran, 6 June 2007.

(1963) cited an 1880 newspaper record of an eel in Lake Monona elsewhere in the Rock River drainage and implied that eels could no longer penetrate that far upstream because of dams. Lathrop et al. (1992) agreed that upstream travel was limited by dams on the Mississippi, Rock and Yahara rivers, but noted Fago's (1982) records from the 1970s. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in August 2004 received two reports of sightings of a fish in Lac LaBelle (Oconomowoc River in the Rock River drainage) that may be attributable to an American Eel (J. Lyons, pers. comm.).

Daily Green Bay State Gazette (May 16, 1881): "Mr. Conolley caught in East River an eel measuring about 3 feet in length, This is the largest sized eel ever caught in that river."

The East River is a tributary that enters the Fox River in Green Bay shortly before the Fox River enters Green Bay of Lake Michigan (Brown County).

Lake Shore Times (June 27, 1882): "An eel twenty inches long and weighing half a pound was caught near the railroad bridge last Tuesday morning." [Manitowoc, along Lake Michigan shoreline, Manitowoc County]

Lake Shore Times (July 29, 1884): "A fisherman on the harbor pier Saturday morning, caught an eel which was about three feet long." [Manitowoc, along Lake Michigan shoreline, Manitowoc County]

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