



87. RIVER LAMPREY / FLUSSNEUNAUGE (*Lampetra fluviatilis*)

Zoologically, Sea – River – and Brook Lamprey belong to the family of hagfish / cyclostomi (Rundmaeuler), and are covered by fishing laws and fishermen should know the basics of the lamprey life.

Sea – and River Lamprey are anadrome animals, meaning they move from marine areas to inland waters for spawning. Late fall, they gather in the lower stretches of rivers and in spring, Sea – and River Lamprey move to their spawning zones.

Sea Lamprey spawn in rivers and major tributaries of large rivers where they deposit their eggs, on gravelly sections of the bank. After hatching larvae (called Querder) bury themselves in the sandy, muddy sediment. There, they will stay for about 3 to 4 years.

The life cycles of River Lamprey and Sea Lamprey are similar. Unlike Sea Lamprey, River Lamprey, however, move further up rivers, sometimes as far as to the trout region. River Lamprey larvae also stay in the sediment for several years. They feed on detritus, which they filter from the water.

After metamorphosis, Sea – and River Lampreys move back to the sea in late spring, where they feed on bigger fish. While the Sea Lamprey is of no significance for fishing management, River Lamprey were caught in great numbers in lower stretches of rivers and sold as delicacy in the past. Today, most fishing laws grant River Lamprey all-year protection. The Sea Lamprey can reach a length of more than 1m, the River Lamprey only about 50 cm.

Brook Lamprey stay in brooks throughout their lives and do not migrate. They are closely related to River Lamprey that zoologists no longer consider them a separate species but a subspecies or local type (type found at certain places). Like other lamprey larvae, Brook Lamprey larvae stay in the sediment for 3 to 4 years. They feed on algae and small creatures drifting by. After the spawning season which lasts from March through late May, adult Brook Lamprey live for only a couple days and then die. Brook Lamprey are considerably smaller than Sea- and River Lamprey reaching lengths of no more than between 20 – 25 cm. They are mostly found in clear trout brooks. They, however, can also be found in ditches if they have clear, clean water. In trout brooks, Brook Lamprey are food for trout. Most fishing laws grant Brook Lamprey all-year protection.