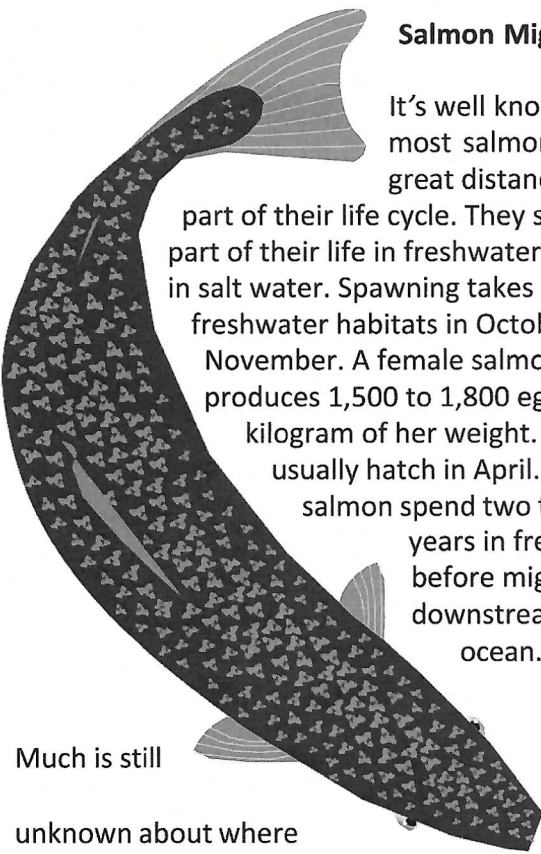


Long Distance Swimmers

Salmon Migration

A detailed illustration of a salmon, shown in profile, facing right. The fish has a dark, patterned body with lighter spots, a prominent dorsal fin, and a large tail. It is curved slightly upwards.

It's well known that most salmon travel great distances as part of their life cycle. They spend part of their life in freshwater and part in salt water. Spawning takes place in freshwater habitats in October and November. A female salmon produces 1,500 to 1,800 eggs per kilogram of her weight. Eggs usually hatch in April. Young salmon spend two to four years in freshwater before migrating downstream to the ocean.

Much is still

unknown about where salmon go when they are at sea.

It appears that some Atlantic salmon do not travel far beyond their home rivers. Other salmon travel long distances, many to the west coast of Greenland where there is lots of food.

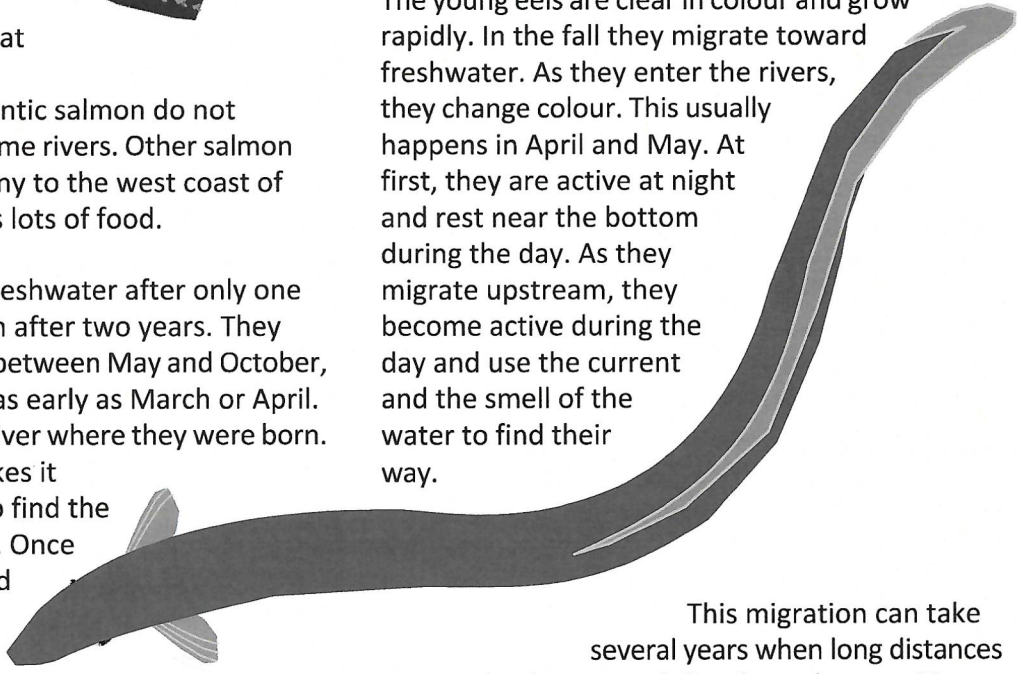
Some salmon return to freshwater after only one year at sea. Others return after two years. They normally enter the rivers between May and October, although sometimes it's as early as March or April. They return to the same river where they were born. Sometimes pollution makes it difficult for the salmon to find the smell of their home river. Once they reach their preferred area, they spawn, continuing the life cycle.

The Atlantic salmon normally survives at least one spawning. After living at sea for another year, some will return to freshwater to spawn at least one more time. Others may spawn three or four times.

Eel Migration

The eel that is commonly found in our region of Canada is called the American eel. It has a long snake-shaped body which is covered with a slippery substance called mucus. This is where the expression "slippery as an eel" comes from. Eels are found in freshwater streams and rivers. They are also found in the Atlantic Ocean. They are very common in the four Atlantic provinces.

Unlike salmon, eels spend most of their lives in freshwater and then go to the sea to spawn. They begin to migrate in late summer and fall. They travel all the way to spawn in the Sargasso Sea, between Bermuda and The Bahamas. Spawning occurs from February to April and the eggs hatch within a few days. Female eels can produce up to 4.0 million eggs. It is thought that all eels die after spawning.

A detailed illustration of an eel, shown in profile, facing left. The eel has a long, slender, snake-like body with a slightly curved shape. It has a small dorsal fin and a tail that tapers to a point.

The young eels are clear in colour and grow rapidly. In the fall they migrate toward freshwater. As they enter the rivers, they change colour. This usually happens in April and May. At first, they are active at night and rest near the bottom during the day. As they migrate upstream, they become active during the day and use the current and the smell of the water to find their way.

This migration can take several years when long distances are involved. Some eels live for as long as 40 years in freshwater before they migrate back to the sea to spawn.

Long Distance Swimmers

Locate where you live and mark it on the map.

Read about the migration of the salmon. Draw the route a salmon takes when it migrates from fresh-water to sea and back to freshwater. How many kilometres does it travel in a complete migration?

Repeat for the migration of the eel.

