

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Wolf-eel

Anarrhichthys ocellatus

Range/Habitat

- The wolf-eel is a marine, shallow-water species found in the North Pacific from the Sea of Japan across the Aleutian Islands and Alaska to Southern California.
- It occurs on rocky reefs and stony bottom shelves from sub-tidal areas to 741 feet (226 m).
- Individuals and, sometimes, mated pairs will establish a den or lair in a cave or crevice where they will remain during the day with only the head exposed.

Physical Characteristics

- The wolf-eel's body is long and tubular, tapering to a pointed tail.
- It has a large head with a bulging brow and a strong jaw with robust, canine-like teeth in front. There are also molar-like teeth at the back of its mouth.
- This eel has large pectoral fins and a single, long dorsal fin that extends the length of the body.
- Adults are dark grey to brown in color with a pattern of darker spots that is unique to each individual. Juveniles are red-orange.
- The wolf-eel can grow to a length of almost 8 feet (240 cm) and weigh 40 lbs. (18.4 kg).

Diet/Feeding

- This species preys on hard-shelled invertebrates (crabs, mollusks and echinoderms) and occasionally on slow-moving fish. It primarily hunts at night.
- Its strong jaws and teeth are well adapted for this type of prey.

Conservation Status

- The wolf-eel has not been evaluated for inclusion on the IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The wolf-eel's body resembles that of a moray eel, but this species is not an eel. It is one of five species in the "wolffish" family (*Anarrhichadidae*).
- In contrast to its menacing appearance, the wolf-eel is very shy and docile, and will not attack unless provoked. However, it can inflict a painful bite.
- An individual or pair will inhabit the same den for years unless driven off by a larger wolf-eel.
- Male and female are believed to form monogamous pairs at about four years of age and may occupy the same den. Spawning takes place during the late fall and winter. The female lays up to 10,000 eggs in the den and, together with the male, guards them until they hatch 13 to 16 weeks later. Both parents will take turns curling their bodies around the egg mass to keep it in place and protect it from predators.
- Juveniles are pelagic for their first two years and then settle to the bottom.
- The wolf-eel swims by making "S" shaped waves with its body, much like a snake.
- This species is a frequent by-catch in crab and fish traps. It is also caught commercially on a small scale and is collected for display in aquariums.

Sources

www.fishbase.net

http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/accounts/information/Anarrhichthys_ocellatus.html

www.montereybayaquarium.org/animals/AnimalDetails.aspx?en

<http://hmsc.oregonstate.edu/projects/msap/ps/masterlist/Fish/wolfeel.html>