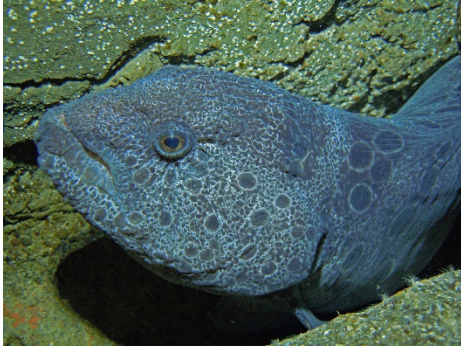




WOLF-EEL (*Anarrhichthys ocellatus*)



Wolf-eels are long fish that have dorsal and anal fins that join together at the end of the body to form a point. Adults are gray, blue-gray, red-brown, or sometimes white in color with dark spots. They have large canine teeth and molars. The males develop a head crest and fleshy mandibles when mature making their jaws look thick. Juveniles are more brightly colored, featuring red, orange, and even purple colorations with large dark spots. Adults are most frequently seen sticking their heads out of crevices and caves, but are sometimes seen swimming in the open.

OVERVIEW

- **Oregon Conservation Strategy Species**
- **Size:** Up to 7.9 feet long
- **Weight:** Up to 40.5 pounds
- **Lifespan:** Up to at least 28 years
- **Key Strategy Habitats:** Nearshore
- **Similar Species:** Monkeyface Pricklebacks are sometimes misidentified as juvenile Wolf-eels.

RANGE AND DISTRIBUTION

In Oregon: Wolf-eels can be found throughout the state's marine waters.

Everywhere Else: Wolf-eels range from the Aleutian Islands down to southern California. They are also found in the Sea of Okhotsk and Sea of Japan.

FUN FACTS

Favorite Foods: Adults eat crabs, snails, sea urchins, mussels, brittle stars, barnacles, and some fish.

- Wolf-eels live in rocky bottom habitat in dens that they sometimes share with Lingcod, several species of rockfish, or Pacific Giant Octopus.
- Pacific Giant Octopus and larger Wolf-eels have been known to cause Wolf-eels to move out of their den.
- Females lay an egg mass in the den which both parents guard.
- Wolf-eels have pectoral fins and are not true eels despite their eel-like appearance.

LIFE HISTORY AND ECOLOGY

Wolf-eels spawn in their den from October to January. A females may lay as many as 10,000 eggs in an egg mass which both parents guard. Only one parent leaves the den to feed at a time while they are guarding the eggs. Females shape the egg mass into a roughly grapefruit sized sphere in their den after they are first laid. They also massage the eggs to keep them well supplied with oxygen as the develop. Eggs hatch in 13 to 16 weeks. The larvae are planktonic and live in the upper water column for up to 2 years before settling out to rocky bottom habitat. Although it has been reported that male



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and female Wolf-eel pairs may mate for life based on both field observations and those in an aquarium, research divers studying mate and den fidelity in Puget Sound found that this was not the case for the Wolf-eels in the wild at their study sites. Wolf-eels in captivity first reproduce at age 7. Wolf-eels can live to at least 28 years. Adult Wolf-eels are territorial, exhibit homing behavior and are not known to undertake long distance migrations, but there is a record of a pelagic juvenile Wolf-eel tagged near Port Hardy British Columbia, Canada being recovered off Willapa Bay, WA about 368 miles from where it was tagged 628 days later.

Known predators of Wolf-eels include rockfish, Sablefish, and greenlings that may eat the young or unguarded eggs and harbor seals have been observed eating adults. Wolf-eels are occasionally taken in both commercial and recreational fisheries.

DIET AND FORAGING

Adults eat crabs, snails, sea urchins, mussels, brittle stars, barnacles, and some fish. They use their strong jaws and teeth to crack open and crush their prey rather than eating them whole like many other fish. Pelagic juveniles eat crab larvae, amphipods and have been reported to eat larval flatfish.

HABITAT CHARACTERISTICS

After living in the water column as planktonic larvae, Wolf-eels settle out to live on hard bottom habitats like rocky reefs, shipwrecks, piers and jetties. They are found from the intertidal zone down to about 1,000 feet.

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

Threats: Wolf-eels may be sensitive to over harvesting or depletion of their food resources by fisheries.

Conservation and management: There is little information about the factors that affect Wolf-eel biomass, population size, or trends anywhere in their range. Wolf-eels are not part of a federal fishery management plan and fisheries for this species are managed by the states, but it is not generally considered to be a fishery target species.

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