

Name: _____

Electric Eels

By Lydia Lukidis



Did you know that electric eels have quite a misleading name? They do! That's because even though it's true they are electric, they're actually not eels! Instead they are a kind of fish called "knifefish." They are closely related to carp and catfish. The most interesting thing about electric eels is that they can produce an electric charge. The shock can go up to 600 volts. That is five times stronger than the electricity produced in a regular wall socket. This can knock down a full grown horse. That's pretty powerful!

The body of an electric eel contains three pairs of special abdominal organs that produce electricity. These organs can produce two types of electricity: high voltage and low voltage. Electric eels use their charge to hunt and protect themselves. They also use the charge in another way. Since these eels have poor eyesight, they don't rely on their eyes to see. Instead, they give out a weak electric signal that they use like radar. This radar helps them find their way around. It also helps them locate their prey.

Electric eels live in fresh water. They are nocturnal, which means they sleep during the day and are active at night. They mostly live in rivers in South America. They like dark waters, mud, and caves. Most of their time is spent underwater. Once in a while, they come up to the surface to breathe. This is pretty unusual. Let's take a look why.

Almost all species of fish breathe oxygen in the water, through their gills. The electric eel, however, is quite different. Electric eels live in waters that have very low levels of oxygen. As a result, they have adapted to their environment in a way that allows them to breathe air. An electric eel

will regularly come to the surface about every ten minutes to inhale air through its mouth, then it will swim back to the bottom of the water.

Electric eels are carnivores, so they love to eat meat. They like to chomp on fish, shrimp, and other small animals like birds or rats. They are very good at attacking their prey, and their teeth are really sharp. Electric eels like to dig in the sand and hide there. That way, they can launch surprise attacks on their prey.



Electric eels are pretty amazing travelers. Some of them even travel up to 4,000 miles to find a mate. That's a long way! This journey can take over 7 months. After they mate, the male uses his saliva to make a nest for eggs. The female can lay up to 17,000 eggs.

If you saw an electric eel, you might think it looks like a snake. They have long, thin bodies. They can be white, black, blue, purple, or gray in color. They can grow to be quite big, even as long as 8 feet! That's taller than most people. They can weigh up to 44 pounds. Some people may be afraid of them since they can look a bit creepy and they produce electric charges. But there's no need to worry. It would be very unusual for you to come in contact with one. And they rarely harm humans. In fact, they are afraid of people. In some cultures, people eat electric eels. They are a delicacy. Since the blood can be toxic, the eels need to be fully cooked. Would you eat one?

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1. How do electric eels produce electricity?

2. Where might you find an electric eel?

- a. in the deep waters of the Pacific Ocean
- b. in the shallow coastal waters of the Mediterranean Sea
- c. in the fresh waters of the Amazon River
- d. only in zoos because they are extinct in the wild

3. Reread the following sentences from the article.

In some cultures, people eat electric eels. They are a delicacy.

Which is the best definition for the underlined word?

- a. a specialty food item
- b. a common snack food
- c. a symbol of good luck
- d. an unlucky omen

4. How are electric eels different from most fish in the way they obtain oxygen to breathe?

- a. Electric eels get oxygen through the food they eat.
- b. Electric eels come up to the surface to breathe air through their mouths.
- c. Electric eels have an extra set of gills on their bodies.
- d. Electric eels do not need to obtain oxygen to survive like other fish.

5. According to what you read in the article, how is an electric eel's name misleading?

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| 1. _____ toxic | a. active at night |
| 2. _____ catfish | b. an outlet in a wall into which you can plug an electrical cord |
| 3. _____ carnivores | c. liquid produced by glands in the mouth |
| 4. _____ nocturnal | d. an element all animals need to survive |
| 5. _____ saliva | e. poisonous |
| 6. _____ organs | f. to keep safe from harm |
| 7. _____ wall socket | g. animals that only eat meat |
| 8. _____ protect | h. parts of an organism that have a special function |
| 9. _____ oxygen | i. a freshwater fish with whiskers |

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In the article, "Electric Eels," you learned that electric eels can produce enough of an electrical charge to knock down a full grown horse.

On the lines below, describe three different purposes for which an electric eel uses its electric charge. Base your answer on the information from the article.



ANSWER KEY

Electric Eels

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Three pairs of special organs

produce the electricity in an electric eel's body.

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c. Electric eels have an extra set of gills on their bodies.

d. Electric eels do not need to obtain oxygen to survive like other fish.

5. According to what you read in the article, how is an electric eel's name misleading?

An electric eel's name is misleading because it is not actually an eel; it is a type of fish called a "knifefish."

ANSWER KEY

Electric Eels

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Match each vocabulary word from the article with the correct definition.

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