

Name: _____

Mysterious Moray Eels

by Guy Belleranti



With a long, slippery body and two sets of sharp-toothed jaws, the moray eel sounds a lot like a sea monster. Moray eels are partly dangerous and partly fascinating, so let's learn about this alien creature of the sea.

A moray eel is a type of fish with a long narrow body and a long dorsal fin running down its back. They look a little like snakes because they lack fins on the sides of their bodies.

One amazing trait of the moray eel is its two sets of jaws, one set right in front and a second set in its throat! After the moray eel snags its prey with its front set of jaws, the second set of jaws grabs the food and pulls it down toward the stomach—just like a scary science fiction monster!

And the moray eel does look scary, especially when it sticks its large head out of a hole while opening and closing its sharp-toothed jaws. Sometimes, a moray eel's jaw movements aren't for catching prey, but for keeping water flowing over its gills so it can capture oxygen to breathe. It's still a good idea to keep your fingers away, though! The moray eel's tiny eyes aren't good, and the eel might mistake your fingers for a tasty snack if you're not careful.

The moray eel usually feeds at night. Its great sense of smell helps it find fish, squid, octopus, mollusks, and crustaceans. Often it hides in the cracks and crevices of rocks and coral reefs. When prey comes near, it strikes!

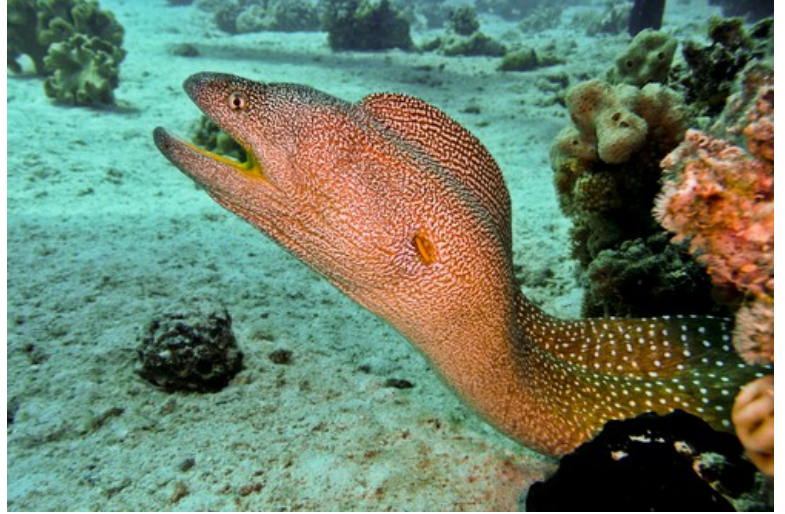
Did you know that sometimes moray eels work together with groupers to hunt for fish? Morays startle prey from small crevices and tight spaces, and both the grouper and moray eels snatch their prey. This is pretty amazing because it's the only instance of interspecies hunting among fish.

What dangers do moray eels face?

Large moray eels have very few natural predators. Smaller ones, however, must watch out for other morays, barracudas, sharks, and grouper.

There are many species of moray eels, and while all are carnivorous (meat-eaters), not all have sharp, pointed teeth. For example, the zebra moray's teeth are flat – perfect for crunching hard-shelled crustaceans.

The smallest moray eel species is less than a foot long, and the largest (the giant moray) can reach up to 12 feet. The largest populations of moray eels live around tropical coral reefs, but some also live in estuaries, where rivers meet the sea.



About the Author

Guy Belleranti is an author of fiction, poetry, articles, puzzles, and humor for children and adults. He also works as a docent at the Reid Park Zoo in Tucson, Arizona. The information in this article comes from his experiences teaching children about the wild animals at the zoo.

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1. What is unique about the way a moray eel digests its prey?
 - a. A moray eel swallows its prey whole.
 - b. A moray eel grabs food with two sets of jaws.
 - c. A moray eel wraps its body around its prey.
 - d. A moray eel catches prey from behind.



2. When a moray eel opens and closes its jaws while peering out of a hole, what might it be doing?
 - a. It is sleeping or resting.



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4. According to the article, a moray eel's predators depend on the size of the moray eel. Which animal is *not* a predator of a moray eel, based on what you read?
 - a. grouper
 - b. other moray eels
 - c. barracudas
 - d. sting rays
 5. According to the article, which of the moray eel's senses is particularly poor?
 - a. hearing
 - b. eyesight
 - c. taste
 - d. smell

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. _____

v c i r c e s e

hint: small spaces where an animal might hide

2. _____

c n f i a s a g t n i

hint: extremely interesting

3. _____

u l o l k s m s

hint: invertebrates such as snails and octopuses

4. _____



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6. _____

s o d r l a

hint: having to do with the upper side of an animal

7. _____

c t s n s u a e r c a

hint: a group of arthropods that includes crabs

8. _____

y i s p l p r e

hint: slick, slimy, or smooth; difficult to hold onto

9. _____

n v a c u s o r i o

hint: having a diet consisting of meat

10. _____

r d e p r o t a s

hint: animals that prey on other animals for food

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In the article, "Mysterious Moray Eels," you learned about the many features of moray eels that make them different from other types of fish. One of these unique features is the set of two jaws moray eels have in order to capture and digest their prey.

On the lines below discuss several other features of moray eels that make them different from other predators in the ocean. Consider their appearance, how they catch their prey, and other facts you learned in the article.



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ANSWER KEY

Mysterious Moray Eels

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1. What is unique about the way a moray eel digests its prey? **b.**
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 - b. A moray eel grabs food with two sets of jaws.**
 - c. A moray eel wraps its body around its prey.
 - d. A moray eel catches prey from behind.



2. V

Preview

Please log in to download
the printable version of this worksheet.

A cartoon superhero character with brown hair, wearing a red cape and a blue suit with 'MJS' on the chest, flying through the air. The background is light blue with white clouds and a large white swoosh.

3. E

4. A

5. A

ping?

ANSWER KEY

Mysterious Moray Eels

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The scrambled words below are vocabulary words from the article. Unscramble each word and write it on the line. Please be sure each word is spelled correctly.

1. crevices v c i r c e s e
hint: small spaces where an animal might hide

2. fascinating c n f i a s a g t n i
hint: extremely interesting

3. **Preview**
4. Please log in to download
the printable version of this worksheet.

and



5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10. predators r d e p r o t a s
hint: animals that prey on other animals for food