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The journey of the eels of Vistonis Lagoon: a story of endurance and transformation!

The eels of Vistonis Lagoon* are born in the Sargasso sea, east of the Caribbean, from where the great homecoming journey begins.

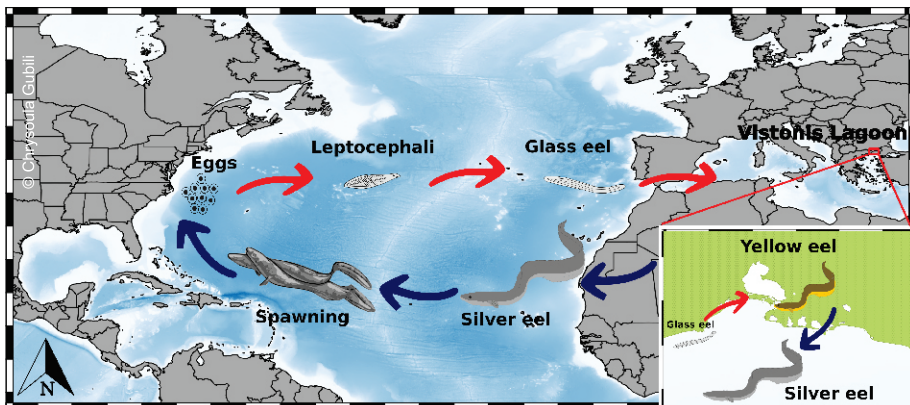
The little eels, the *leptocephali*, transparent and vigorous, return to the place where their parents grew up. They follow the sea currents and persist. After 2-3 years they reach the shores of the North Aegean, change shape, and become *glass eels* a few centimeters long.

They remain near the coast for six months to two years and then enter the brackish, nutritious waters of Vistonis Lagoon and transform into *yellow eels*, that can withstand the low salinity of the lagoon.

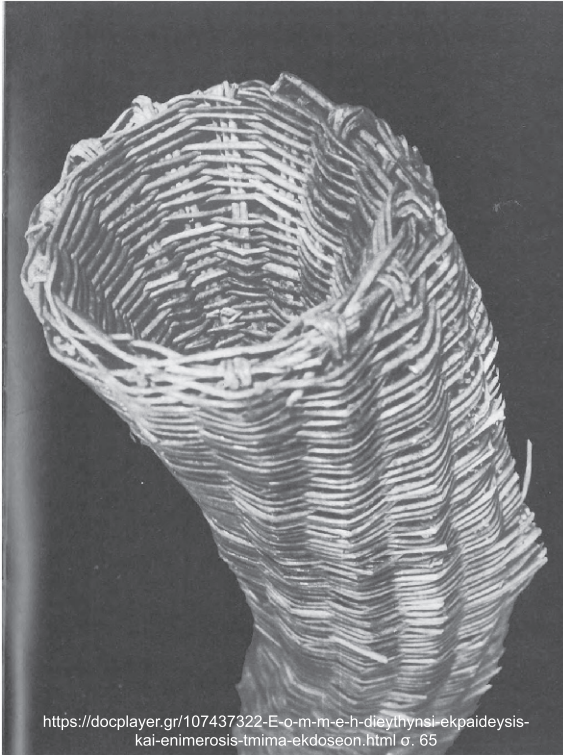
In these waters, they feed and grow for 7-9 years. When they have grown enough and have matured, they are transformed for the last time and become *silver eels* capable of reproduction. They exchange their ability to eat with the ability to reproduce and a powerful instinct makes them begin, some moonless nights, the journey to the Sargasso Sea for the last act of their life, the reproduction.

After crossing the approximately 10,000 kilometers that separate Vistonis Lagoon from the Sargasso Sea, in the warm waters they mate and die, leaving behind the new generation of eels that will start the journey from the beginning.

* the same goes for all the eels of Europe and West Africa



The eels were traditionally caught in cylindrical traps made of reeds that were placed along the course of the river, or, in specially arranged traps at the openings of lagoons.



Eels are characterized by fatty flesh which makes them ideal for pickling and smoking. They are very popular in many countries in Europe, but their consumption seems to have been largely forgotten in Greece. However, in some parts of the country, they now support a dynamic small scale industry.

Eels were among the most desirable and expensive fish in antiquity. They arrived packed alive in the markets of large cities of ancient Greece from long distances. In Athens of the 4th c. BC, for example, one could buy eels from Kópais Lake wrapped in beet leaves. The fame of eels from the Strymon River had also reached Athens in those days.

The mysterious life cycle of eels had given rise to a number of theories, especially about their reproduction. Aristotle, in his "*History of Animals*", states that eels were born from the mud, from the so-called intestines of the earth!



Common eel names in Greek

ευρωπαϊκό χέλι - european eel, γλαβίτσι - glavitsi, καβάτσα - kavatsa, καθαρόχελο - katharochelo and σουβλομύταρο - souvlomytaro



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