

## Oceans Animal Facts

**COMMON/SCIENTIFIC NAME:** Green Moray Eel, Green Cong, Green Conger, Green Congo, Green Eel, Olive Green Moray Eel, Black Moray, Morena, and *Vihermureena (Gymnothorax funebris)*

**TERMS:** *Male*- Male *Female*- Female *Young*- Larvae, Leptocephalus (slender head), Juvenile

**DISTRIBUTION:** Western Atlantic Ocean from New Jersey to Bermuda and the northern Gulf of Mexico, south to Brazil, including Ascension Island, common throughout warm waters of the Bahamas, Caribbean Sea, and Florida Keys. Has been recorded as far north as Nova Scotia, Canada carried by the Gulf Stream.



**HABITAT:** Coral reefs, mangroves, rocky shorelines, tidal creeks, seagrass beds, areas over sand and mud bottoms, shallow coastal waters of tropical seas, hide in crevices, prefers shallow water less than 100 feet.

**DIET:** *Wild* – Opportunistic omnivores that feed on octopus, shrimp, small crabs, lobster, mollusks and small fish

*Zoo* – Squid, capelin, shrimp, clams and herring

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** The body of the moray eel is very muscular, laterally compressed, elongated, snakelike, and flexible due to more than 100 vertebrae in the spinal column. The Green moray has lateral line pores on their heads but not on their body. The skin is scale-less and is smooth to the touch. There are no pelvic or pectoral fins, but the dorsal and anal fins are long and extend down the body. The head of the eel is very dinosaur like with three rows of teeth, incurrent nostrils that are tube-like structures and excurrent gills in the form of small slits.

**Coloration:** The Green moray can be yellow, green, brown, or olive. Its coloration is the result of thick, yellow mucus that covers its blue skin. This mucus helps to protect it from parasites and disease.

**Size:** Average weight and length is 30 pounds and 6 feet. Maximum reported size is 58 pounds and 8 feet.

**REPRODUCTION/GESTATION:** Spawning occurs in deep water. Once the female lays her eggs and the male fertilizes them, the pair leaves one another. Eggs range in size from 1-4mm. Once hatched, development in morays include progression from larvae, to leptocephali, then to juveniles. The leptocephalus is approximately 6 inches long, almost transparent (due to lacking red blood cells) and are shaped like slender willow leaves. Young morays will drift amongst plankton as they develop. Ocean current will carry the young toward coastal waters and young will develop color and fins within 3 years.

**LONGEVITY:** Insufficient data.

**ECOLOGY & CONSERVATION:** *Status in the wild* – The Green moray is not listed in the IUCN Red List as endangered or threatened.

GENERAL INFORMATION: (behavior, interesting facts, etc.)

- The Moray eel belongs to the suborder Elopomorpha, which includes tarpons, eels, and halosaurs and over 730 species worldwide.
- Some moray eels have poor eyesight and use their sense of smell to find prey.
- Morays open their mouth, not to look threatening, but to draw water in and out, which is necessary for respiration.
- Moray eels forage for food at night.
- Morays can swim backwards as well as forwards.
- *Gymnothorax* comes from the Greek derivatives of “gymno” meaning naked and “thorax” meaning breast
- Moray eels have been associated with frequent reports of ciguatera poisoning in humans consuming eels as food. Ciguatoxin is very heat-resistant, so ciguatoxin-laden fish cannot be detoxified by cooking. Due to the localized nature of the ciguatoxin-producing micro-organisms, ciguatera illness is only common in tropical waters, particularly the Caribbean. The symptoms of ciguatera are gastrointestinal distress (nausea, vomiting) followed by neurological symptoms such as headaches, muscle aches, numbness, and hallucinations. Severe cases of ciguatera can also result in hot-cold reversal, in which hot and cold sensations seem reversed.
- The genus *Gymnothorax* contains 118 species worldwide.