



chestnut lamprey

Ichthyomyzon castaneus

Kingdom: Animalia
Division/Phylum: Chordata - vertebrates
Class: Agnatha
Order: Petromyzoniformes
Family: Petromyzontidae

Features

The chestnut lamprey larva may grow to six or more inches long. The larva does not have eyes and its mouth is shaped like a horseshoe. Adults may be eight to 13 inches long. The adult's mouth is as wide or wider than the head and contains sharp teeth. A cartilage skeleton supports the yellow or tan body. It has one dorsal fin.

Natural History

The chestnut lamprey lives in lakes and streams. Adults move into streams to spawn in late winter and spring. The female may deposit more than 42,000 eggs in a nest that is hollowed out on the stream bottom. The ammocoete is the blind, larval form that hatches from the egg. It burrows into the stream bottom with its head sticking out to filter microscopic organisms that pass by. The larval stage lasts several years. The adult lives one year, but it feeds for only about five months midway through its life span. The adult chestnut lamprey is parasitic on fish. It attaches to a fish and scrapes a hole in the body through which

it sucks out blood and tissue fluid. After feeding on a fish in this manner for several days, the lamprey drops off. The fish generally is not killed directly by the attack, but may die due to infections that invade through the wound.

Habitats

Mississippi River

Iowa Status

threatened; native

Iowa is on the edge of the chestnut lamprey's range. It is restricted to the Mississippi River and likely was never common there. Changes in our river system may have impacted abundance.

Iowa Range

Mississippi River

Bibliography

Iowa Department of Natural Resources. 2001.
Biodiversity of Iowa: Aquatic Habitats CD-ROM.