



MARINE LIFE PROFILE

MUSTACHE CONGER EEL or WHITE EEL

Hawaiian name:	puhi ūhā
Scientific name:	<i>Conger cinereus</i>
Distribution:	Indo-Pacific, including Hawai‘i
Size:	to 4.5 feet (1.4 m)
Diet:	carnivore on crustaceans and fishes

Conger eels (Family Congridae) are true bony fishes with bodies highly modified to suit their life style. The elongated body of the eel includes continuous dorsal and anal fins, as well as the paired pectoral fins set just behind the head. Most species have a relatively large mouth and short, tube-like nostrils. The gill opening is reduced and the smooth skin lacks scales. Congers can be distinguished from moray eels by their nearly cylindrical bodies and the well-developed pectoral (side) fins. Most conger eel species occur in cooler temperate or deep slope waters, but a few species are found in shallow water. In Hawai‘i, the most common is the mustache conger (*Conger cinereus*), known locally as the white eel. The Hawaiian garden eel (*Gorgasia hawaiiensis*) is much smaller & lives in large colonies on sandy flats at depths 35-175 feet (11-53 m). The barred conger (*Poecilconger fasciatus*) is about 2 feet long (0.6 m), has a narrower head and white body patterned spots and irregular narrow bars; it lives in sand.

The Hawaiian mustache conger reaches 4.5 feet (1.4 m) in length and may be seen on reefs and reef flats, in caves and under ledges. The body is brownish gray; a black streak below the eye runs parallel to the upper lip, the dorsal and anal fins are edged in black, and there is black area on pectoral fins. The lips have a free margin on the side that looks something like a mustache. Pale by day, the mustache conger is marked with strong pattern of broad dark bands at night. The species has an Indo-Pacific distribution, with a different subspecies found in Hawai‘i, *Conger cinereus* subsp. *marginatus*.

During the day, the mustache conger retreats to holes, caves or ledges. It emerges at night to search over the reef for prey using its keen sense of smell. It may eat inactive day-active fishes that are resting within the reef framework at night, as well as on the more night-active crustaceans like shrimp and crabs. The large mouth contains many small, stout teeth. The conger eel is more favored as a food fish in Hawai‘i than moray eels.

Classification:

Kingdom Animalia
Phylum Chordata, Subphylum Vertebrata
Class Osteichthyes
Order Anguilliformes
Family Congridae
Genus Conger
Species cinereus
Subspecies marginatus

MUSTASCHE CONGER EEL
pūhi ūhā
Conger cinereus

