

Louisiana asks public help with invasive Asian swamp eels

June 29 2019

An invasive species of swamp eel has been found in New Orleans, and a state biologist says it's the first time this species has been found in the United States.

Investigators don't know whether the Asian swamp eels were released accidentally or on purpose in Bayou St. John, said Robert Bourgeois, aquatic nuisance species coordinator for the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. They might have been released from an aquarium or for food, he said.

They eat the same things [native animals](#) and fish do - fish, frogs, shrimp, crawfish, and other aquatic invertebrates, such as worms and insects - but their effect on [native species](#) is not known, Bourgeois said.

"It is no threat to humans. It is a common food fish in Asia," he said.

Bourgeois said other [species](#) of Asian swamp eels have been found over the years in New Jersey, Hawaii, Georgia, and Florida.

The brown, gold-speckled eels don't have fins, while native eels do, he said. They can grow up to 2½ feet (three-quarters of a meter) long.

The department is checking nearby water bodies to see whether the eels have spread. "Currently we have not found them anywhere outside the bayou," Bourgeois said.

The department is asking the public to help find out how widespread they are by putting any found into a [plastic bag](#), labeling it to show exactly where it was found, putting it in the freezer, and emailing the department at aquaticinvasives@la.gov or calling 225-765-3977 to arrange for pickup.

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