

Be an Origami Naturalist: American "Glassy" Eel

Ages: 6 and up

Duration: 15–30 minutes

Materials needed: One square sheet of tissue paper, cellophane, or plastic, 4 to 8 inches on each side; drawing materials; tape (optional).

Introduction: No matter the season, the Hudson Valley is full of life. If you can't get out into nature and explore in person (or even if you can), why not learn about a local creature by making one of your very own? With some household items, you can use the art of origami to make your own beautiful animal. Follow the illustrated instructions on the following page, or visit hrm.org/science-projects for a step-by-step video.

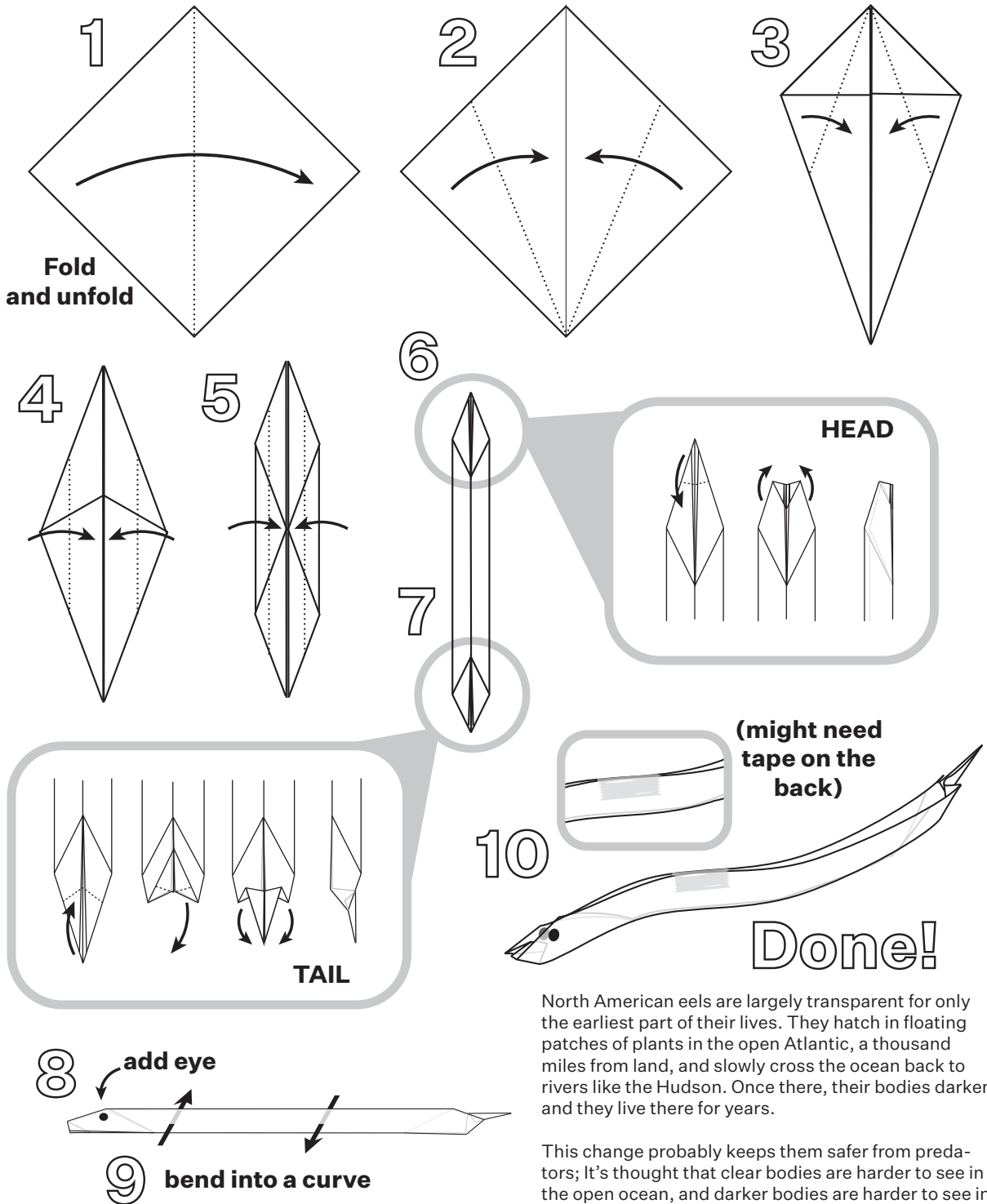
American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*): Eels have a complex life cycle and go through big changes in their appearance between hatching from eggs in the open ocean, swimming to the Hudson where they live for most of their lives, and traveling back into the ocean to spawn.

For this activity, you'll be making an origami American eel that is in the "glassy" part of its life cycle. When eels hatch, they are translucent creatures the shape of a blade of crabgrass. These infant eels spend their earliest days living among the mats of floating sargassum weed which make up the Sargasso Sea, a part of the Atlantic Ocean where a swirl of ocean currents cause floating material to accumulate. Currents at the edge of this region carry them away from the sargassum. Slowly their travel becomes more purposeful, and they begin heading for the shore. By the time they reach rivers like the Hudson, they have grown into glass eels—roughly the shape of an adult eel, but still largely transparent.

To make your glass eel "glassy," try using decorative tissue paper, cellophane, or a clear plastic wrapper. If you use plastic, you will probably need to tape the eel so it can hold its shape. It's a little origami cheat . . . but the result is unique. If you do use plastic, try to repurpose something you would have otherwise discarded. And make sure to keep any excess from escaping into the larger environment! The Sargasso Sea is full of vegetation, but it's also quickly filling with plastic debris. Eels have enough challenges as it is.



American eel (*Anguilla rostrata*)



North American eels are largely transparent for only the earliest part of their lives. They hatch in floating patches of plants in the open Atlantic, a thousand miles from land, and slowly cross the ocean back to rivers like the Hudson. Once there, their bodies darken and they live there for years.

This change probably keeps them safer from predators; it's thought that clear bodies are harder to see in the open ocean, and darker bodies are harder to see in silty, vegetation-crowded streams.

Share: Post a photo of your origami creation to Instagram, add the #OrigamiNaturalist and #MuseumFromHome hashtags, and tag @HudsonRiverMuseum.