

## Cusk Eel

*Lepophidium cervinum* (Goode and Bean) 1885 [80]  
[Jordan and Evermann, 1896-1900, p. 2484.]



Figure 273 - Cusk eel (*Lepophidium cervinum*).  
After Goode and Bean. Drawing by H. L. Todd.

## Description

The cusk eel is about 12 to 13 times as long as it is deep, all its fins are soft and eel-like; and there is no separation between the dorsal, caudal, and anal fins, but the three form one continuous fin running backward along the [page 518] back, around the tip of the tail, and forward on the lower surface. But it is separated from all the true eels, by the presence of ventral fins, situated on the throat far in front of the pectorals, and reduced to forked barbel-like structures. The structure of the ventral fins and the uninterrupted dorsal fin separate the cusk eel from the ocean pout, its near relative among local fishes. And the presence of a short sharp spine on the top of the snout pointing forward and downward, which is easily felt if not seen (for it is nearly concealed in the skin), likewise differentiates it from such other Gulf of Maine species as it resembles in general appearance. The shape of the snout, too, is distinctive, as are its rather large scales, for the other genera of its family have naked heads, and the scales on their bodies are very small.

## Color

Brownish yellow, darker above than below, the upper part of each side marked with a row of 14 to 23 roundish white or pale brown spots. The dorsal and anal fins have narrow black or dusky margins. It seems that the adult color pattern develops late, for neither the spots nor the edgings on the fins are visible in a young specimen of 23/5 inches.

## Size

The type specimen was about 103/8 inches (262 mm.) long.

## General range and occurrence in the Gulf of Maine

This fish has been taken at various localities along the outer part of the continental shelf from off Florida to eastward of Nantucket, in depths of 38 to 102 fathoms. It is mentioned here because one specimen has been taken in 76 fathoms off Nantucket Shoals,[81] while two others, about 77/8 and 8½ inches long (newly swallowed) were found in the stomach of a white hake (*Urophycis tenuis*) that was trawled on the southwestern part of Georges Bank (lat. 40°31' N., long. 68°55' W.), at 39 fathoms, by the dragger Eugene H. on June 27, 1951.

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[80] See Jordan and Evermann (Bull. 47, U. S. Nat. Mus., Pt. 3, 1898, p. 2482) for the nomenclatural history of the name *Lepophidium* Gill 1895.

[81] Goode and Bean, Smithson. Contrib. Knowl., vol. 30, 1895, p. 347.

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**Fishes of the Gulf of Maine** by Bigelow & Schroeder is the seminal work on North Atlantic fishes. It was originally published in 1925 with William Welsh, a Bureau of Fisheries scientist who often accompanied Henry Bigelow on his research cruises. In the late 1920's, Bigelow began a long association with William C. Schroeder, publishing a number of papers and reports on fishes of the North Atlantic, including the first revision of *Fishes of the Gulf of Maine*. This excerpt is from that 1953 edition.

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