



Care For Us

Spotted Garden Eels (*Heterocongrinae hassi*)

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have a good standard of welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare - throughout their entire life.





Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry provisions for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.

Spotted garden eels can be found in the Indo-Pacific, preferring to inhabit sandy areas that border coral reefs.

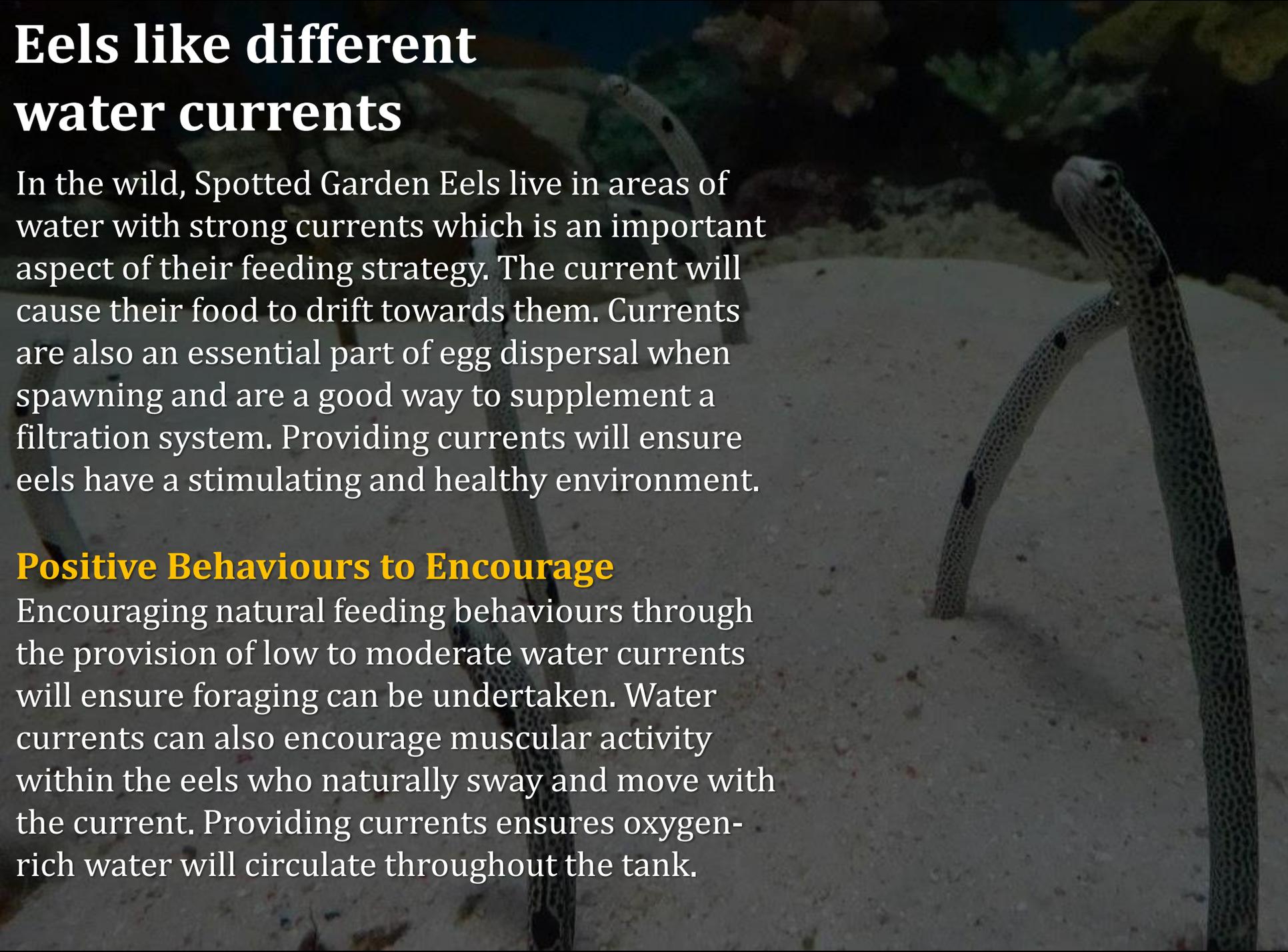
They can grow up to 40 cm long and adults have a white body covered in small black spots. There are three larger spots highlighting the position of the gills, pectoral fins and anus. Males and females are sexually dimorphic with males being larger than females and possessing a more distinct jaw. Juveniles are entirely black.

These eels can live between 35 and 40 years and tend to live in colonies, often resembling swaying grass on the sea floor.

The IUCN classes them as least concern but they can be at risk from the demands of the pet trade.



Eels like different water currents

The background image shows two spotted garden eels in an aquarium. One eel is on the left, partially buried in the sand, with its head and upper body visible. The other eel is on the right, standing upright on the sand. Both eels have a light-colored body with dark spots and bands. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some greenery and a sandy bottom.

In the wild, Spotted Garden Eels live in areas of water with strong currents which is an important aspect of their feeding strategy. The current will cause their food to drift towards them. Currents are also an essential part of egg dispersal when spawning and are a good way to supplement a filtration system. Providing currents will ensure eels have a stimulating and healthy environment.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Encouraging natural feeding behaviours through the provision of low to moderate water currents will ensure foraging can be undertaken. Water currents can also encourage muscular activity within the eels who naturally sway and move with the current. Providing currents ensures oxygen-rich water will circulate throughout the tank.

Eels like specific environments

Providing eels with lots of space within a tank can prevent males from fighting with each other. Large spaces can also hold more individuals before carrying capacity is reached. A suggested minimum tank size is 125 gallons with an ideal PH of 8 and temperature between 22°C and 26°C. Salinity should be between sg 1.020-1.025 with any changes to levels created gradually to avoid stress. Seagrass within the tank can act as a visual barrier and a natural opportunity for camouflage.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Providing the choice to hide away from visitors is essential for the welfare of this timid species. Live rocks, seagrasses, a large tank and deep sand substrates can ensure an environment which provides choices and comfort for each individual.



Eels like deep sand

Deep substrates of at least 6–10 inches are important for garden eels because they spend their entire life partially submerged in burrows made from sand. Once a burrow is made using the tail, the eel will secrete slime from their skin to cement the edges of the burrow and prevent collapse. They will quickly retreat into a burrow when a threat is perceived. If the sand is not deep enough, eels can damage their tails during burrow excavation.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

An environment should provide and encourage natural behaviours such as burrowing and the choice to retreat into a burrow when feeling threatened. A choice of different burrowing sites is also recommended. Control over the maintenance of an individual burrow is also important for an eel's welfare.

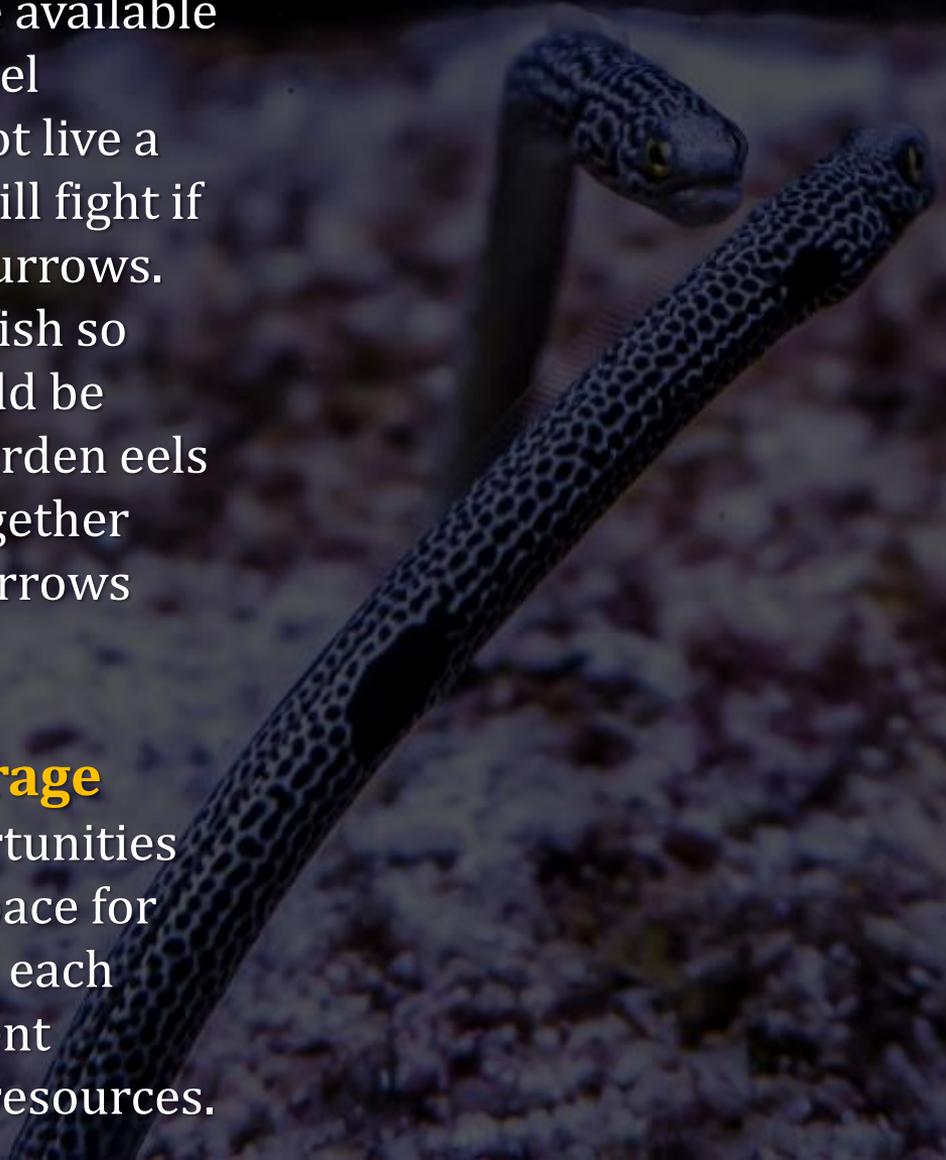


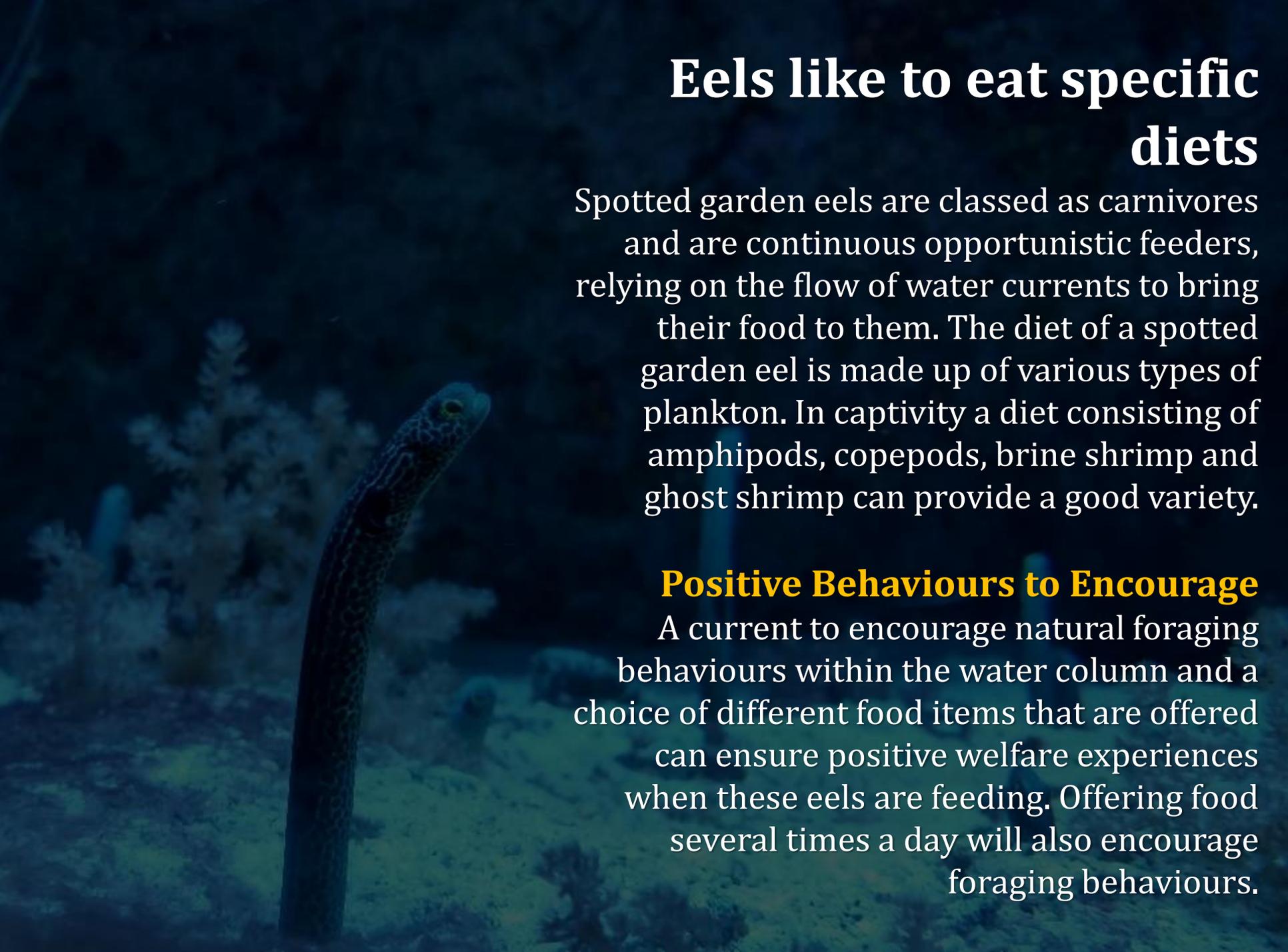
Eels like to be social

Spotted garden eels often live in large colonies numbering in the hundreds or thousands, depending on the space available within the habitat. Although each eel inhabits its own burrow, they do not live a solitary existence in the wild but will fight if not given enough space between burrows. They can be predated on by other fish so mixed species exhibit species should be selected carefully. When mating, garden eels will entwine their upper bodies together with their tails still in their own burrows and stay this way for hours.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Providing appropriate social opportunities through the provision of enough space for multiple eels to live in proximity to each other but far enough away to prevent aggression over mate selection or resources.



A spotted garden eel is visible in the background of the slide, extending vertically from the bottom left towards the center. The eel has a dark body with lighter spots and a yellowish eye. The background is a dark, blue-tinted aquarium setting with some coral or rock structures.

Eels like to eat specific diets

Spotted garden eels are classed as carnivores and are continuous opportunistic feeders, relying on the flow of water currents to bring their food to them. The diet of a spotted garden eel is made up of various types of plankton. In captivity a diet consisting of amphipods, copepods, brine shrimp and ghost shrimp can provide a good variety.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

A current to encourage natural foraging behaviours within the water column and a choice of different food items that are offered can ensure positive welfare experiences when these eels are feeding. Offering food several times a day will also encourage foraging behaviours.

Spotted Garden Eels enjoy...

A suitable environment that promotes all their natural behaviours, including large spaces with deep substrates, appropriate diets and water currents.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours, so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.

