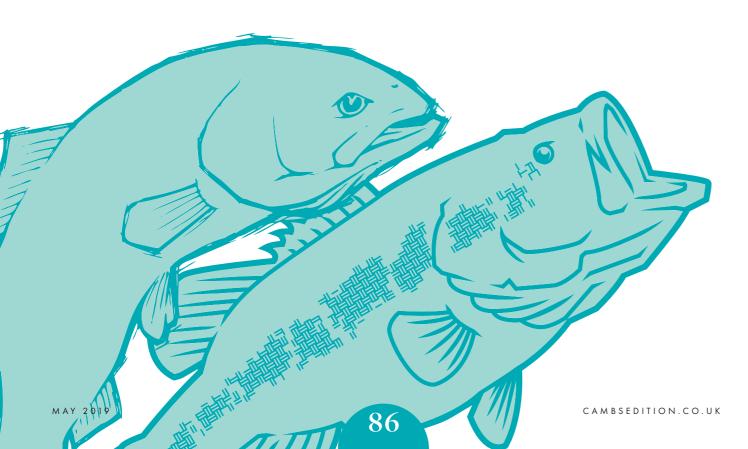
Swimming along the River Cam to Ely

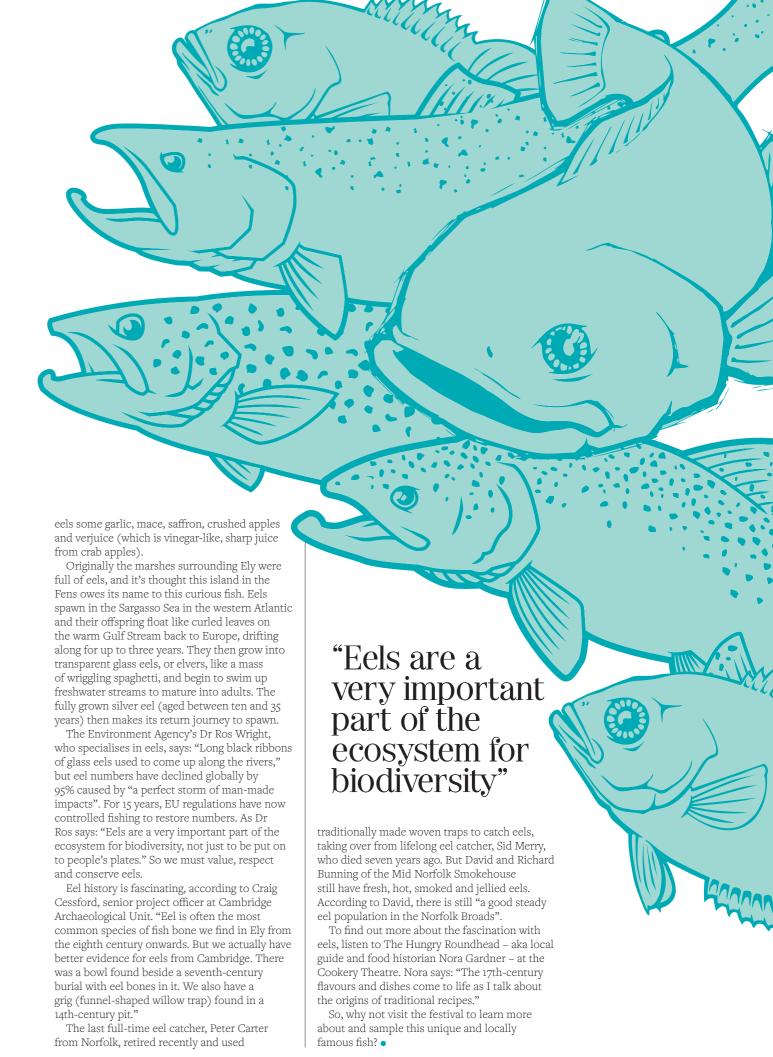
PURPORTEDLY NAMED FOR ITS ABUNDANCE OF EELS, ELY STILL CELEBRATES THIS FASCINATING FISH EACH MAY, AS DR SUE BAILEY DISCOVERS

f anyone had mentioned jellied eels to me, I would have squirmed. But I was converted when I tasted the tangy-sweet-smoky flavour of a smoked eel at last year's Ely Eel Festival. Now an established date in the local food lover's calendar, this annual event hosts all kinds of eel-based fun, from the World Eel Throwing competition (fortunately not with live eels) to a food and drink festival, and runs over the spring bank holiday weekend from 3 to 6 May. The 16th Eel Day Parade

heads off from the High Street to the river, while the Eel Food Safari runs throughout, with local cafes and restaurants providing creative twists on the eel theme. At the Ely Eel Festival, this amazing fish is celebrated with music, dancing, a living history encampment, a beer and cider tent, more than 75 artisan food and drink traders, and street food. I, myself, will be acting as eccentric cook Fanny Cradock in the Cookery Theatre, too, making an eel-shaped cake and talking about eels' past popularity, so do come and say hello!

Once, eels were a staple food in the Fens, and jellied eels from Ely lured Londoners to visit. The Old Fire Engine House restaurant in Ely has eel hooks in the kitchen and tales are told of a cut-off eel's head shooting along the preparation counter. This was in the late 80s and, according to one of the ladies working there, put her off eels completely. When eels were much more available, they used to serve the delicious traditional eel pie topped with a puff pastry crust. An early 15th-century recipe adds to the





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