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Threatened fishes of the world: *Hippocampus erectus* Perry, 1810 (Syngnathidae)

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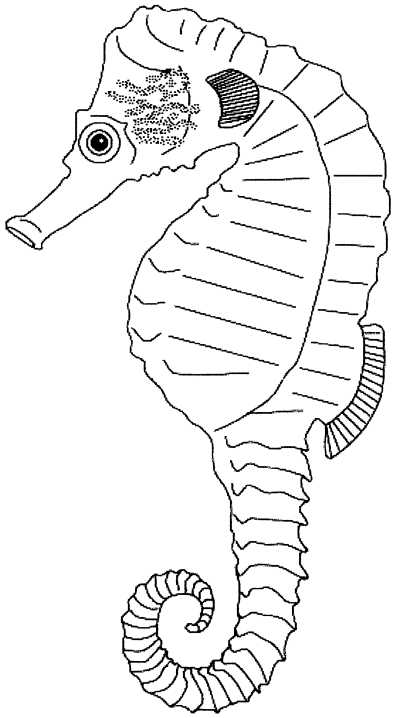

Common names: Cavalo-marinho (Por), lined seahorse (E), caballito-de-mar (Spa), hippocampe rayé (Fr). **Conservation status:** Vulnerable according to IUCN (2000) and the List of Threatened Animals of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo States, Brazil. **Identification:** D 18-19 (16-20); P 15-16 (14-18); rings 11 + 36 (34-39); base colour ash grey, orange, brown, yellow, red or black, often with a pattern of white lines following contour of neck and sometimes with saddle marks on dorsal surface; tiny white dots on tail. Minimum adult size 55 mm (Lourie et al. 1999), maximum 220 mm TL (personal observation, TLD, ILR). Illustration from Ginsburg (1937). **Distribution:** From Canada, southern tip of Nova Scotia to Brazil, north, Rio de Janeiro, including Gulf of Mexico (Lourie et al. 1999). According to Robins & Ray (1986) its range extends to Argentina. **Abundance:** In Brazil it is known to occur singly or in pairs; found from shallow waters of 20 cm (personal observation, TLD, ILR) to depths of 73 m (Vari 1982). A by catch study and trade research suggests that *H. erectus* is more abundant than *H. reidi* in the Gulf of Mexico and in Central America (JKB unpublished data). Underwater observations and indirect evidence from trade, however, suggests that it might be less abundant than *H. reidi* in Brazil (personal observation, TLD, ILR). **Habitat and ecology:** It is known to occur in association with seagrass (*Thalassia testudinum*, *Halophila* sp.), floating *Sargassum*, mangrove roots (mostly *Rhizophora mangle* and *Avicennia* sp.), *Caulerpa* spp., *Carijoa* sp., sponges and *Ascidia* spp., usually relying on these substrates as holdfasts (personal observation). It can tolerate a marked range in salinity and temperature (Vari 1982). In Brazil it has been found in salinity of 45‰. Its diet consists mainly of small copepods, amphipods and other small crustaceans (Leim & Scott 1966). **Reproduction:** Apparently matures during the first reproductive season after birth, at age six to twelve months (Lourie et al. 1999); gestation period 20–21 days, varying with water temperature; egg diameter 1.5 mm and young approximately 9 mm long at birth (Vincent 1990). Reproductive period apparently from May to October; number of eggs/embryos inside the brood pouch of males with TL of 80–126 mm, from 97 to 1552; number of pre-hydrated oocytes in females with TL of 60–123 mm, from 90 to 1313; newborn released by ejection from the brood pouch by body contortions and pumping action of the pouch (Teixeira & Musick 2001). **Threats:** Collection for domestic folk medicine and souvenir trades, and domestic and international aquarium trades in Mexico, Brazil, and for domestic trades in Central America; by catch in shrimp trawl fisheries in U.S., Mexico and Central America, some of which is retained for export for use in the Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) trade; destruction of habitats. **Conservation recommendations:** Suitable sanctuary zones should be created, where fishing (target and trawling) is prohibited or strictly regulated; population parameters (including mortality estimates) and ecology should be investigated in the wild. Further taxonomic research should be undertaken to determine the status of populations throughout the species' range. **Remarks:** The unique reproduction of seahorses and the fact that they may be regarded as a flagship species that can help to promote marine conservation provide important reasons for their conservation.

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