

Seahorses along Thoothukudi coast

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During routine visit to the Mottaigopuram fish landing centre at Thoothukudi on 27.7.2015 and on 20.10.2015, five numbers of seahorses were collected from the fish catch kept for auctioning. These were caught in indigenous trawl operated along the near shore sea grass beds at Thoothukudi. This gear mainly targets juveniles of prawn (especially *Penaeus semisulcatus*), crabs, cephalopods and fishes. Occasionally stray numbers of seahorses are also caught. The species obtained in the present collections were *Hippocampus fuscus*, *H. trimaculatus* and *H. spinosissimus*.

1. *Hippocampus fuscus*

Height: 104.2 mm; Trunk rings: 11; Tail rings: 35; Head length: 22.9 mm; Snout length: 8 mm;

Head length/Snout length: 2.86; Dorsal fin rays: 16; Pectoral fin rays 15; Coronet: Low, arch of neck is a smooth curve or is slightly raised and rough; Spines: low, slightly developed; head large compared to body; deep head; slightly dark



Fig. 1. *Hippocampus fuscus*

2. *Hippocampus trimaculatus*

Height: 94.1 mm; Trunk rings: 11; Tail rings: 40; Head length: 21.3 mm; Snout length: 9.9 mm;

Head Length/Snout length: 2.15; Dorsal fin rays: 20; Pectoral fin rays: 17; Coronet: Low, in line with arch of neck, visible as five tiny points; Spines: low and small; Sharp, hook-like cheek and eye spines (appear flat); narrow head; no nose spine; Colour pattern: Golden orange, sandy coloured; large dark spots on the dorso-lateral surface of the first, fourth and seventh trunk rings



Fig. 2. *Hippocampus trimaculatus*

3. *Hippocampus spinosissimus*

Height : 98 mm; Trunk rings: 11; Tail rings : 37; Head length : 21.1 mm; Snout length: 9.9 mm; Head Length/Snout length: 2.2; Dorsal fin rays : 20; Pectoral fin rays : 16; Coronet: five sharp spines; Spines: well developed, sharp, longer on first, fourth, seventh and eleventh trunk rings; Single cheek spine; small nose spine; spine in front of coronet rather undeveloped. Males have strongly

developed blunt-tipped spines bordering the pouch;
Colour pattern: Variable, pale with darker saddles
across dorso-lateral surface and with darker cross-
bands on tail.



Fig. 3. *Hippocampus spinosissimus*

The entire genus of *Hippocampus* is listed in Appendix II of Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) effective from May 2004. *H. trimaculatus* is listed as vulnerable and *H. fuscus* as data deficient by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). In India, all species of *Hippocampus* have been placed under Schedule -I of the Wild Life Protection Act (1972) in 2001 which bans any collection or trade of seahorses. According to the fishermen, earlier there were agents who would purchase live seahorses for ₹ 25 per piece. However, due to the intervention of the Forest Department and for fear of punishment, this trade has now stopped. Any seahorse noticed while sorting the catch is therefore released back to the sea. This feedback from the fishermen might be true as the traders did not show any objection when these seahorses present in the catch to be auctioned were collected for the present study.