



## **How To Train Your Dragon, Operant Conditioning of the Weedy Seadragon, *Phyllopteryx taeniolatus***

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July, 2015, Newport Aquarium acquired 0.0.20 juvenile Weedy Seadragons, *Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*, F1 generation from a wild-collected gravid male. Following a one month acclimation period, a discriminative stimulus (visual target) was introduced along with live mysid feeds. Initially, the target was presented concurrently with positive reinforcement feeds, and progressed to target presentation prior to the addition of food. To date, not only does this large group of Seadragons exhibit targeting behavior in the absence of food, but can also be lead to different positions within the exhibit by the movement of the target. The use of operant conditioning in this species has implications in feeding/live food dispersal, exhibit maintenance and diving, veterinary examinations, and animal transfers.

**Keywords:** Ex situ and aquaculture, Behavioural ecology, Behavioural ecology