



New opportunities for conservation and aquaculture using “rafting seahorses”

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Rafting has been proposed as a dispersive mechanism for some species of seahorses. Juveniles of *Hippocampus patagonicus* have been reported in high numbers doing rafting in the sea surface. In this study, 102 juveniles seahorses were captured at the beginning (early; n=50) and at the end (late; n=52) of the reproductive season (summer) while they were rafting. We divided each group (early and late) in two groups and cultured them in two recirculation systems. One of the systems was set at 20°C (warm) while, in the other, the temperature varied down to 12°C (cold). We recorded the number of individual deaths at the time of occurrence. The highest number of deaths was recorded during the coldest period of the year in the “cold” system. It accounted for 22% of the “early” and 71% of the “late” seahorses. No seahorses were found dead in the “warm” system. The results suggested that low temperatures could be lethal to most of the juveniles born at the end of the reproductive season. In the wild, most of them would have probably died. In future studies, rafting seahorses could be used as a genetic diverse bloodstock to plan a sustainable aquaculture project. We recommend the use of “late seahorses” in conservation projects particularly those focused to reintroduce the species in the wild.

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