Seahorses of the East Atlantic

There are currently three recognized species of seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp.) in the western Atlantic Ocean. All of these seahorses tend to live in relatively shallow coastal areas with 3D-structured habitat, including seagrasses, corals, and mangroves.

Masters of Disguise

Seahorses are well-camouflaged, and individuals can be covered by seaweeds and sediments in the wild. **Color and lengths of skin filaments (“hairs”) can vary for individuals within the same species and so are NOT useful for identification.** Practice your identification skills before starting surveys.

Seahorse Parts

*Hippocampus barbouri*


**Female**

In females, the belly does not extend past the **bottom of the dorsal fin.** If you are uncertain, it is likely male.

**Male**

- Eye spine
- Nose spine
- Cheek spines
- Brood pouch (males only)
Don’t Know Which Seahorse Species? How to Photograph for ID

For unknown species, record the following characteristics:

- **Torso length**  
  (distance from top of coronet to base of dorsal fin)
- **Head length**  
  (from immediately behind the operculum – the flap covering the gills – to tip of snout)
- **Snout length**  
  (from bump immediately in front of the eye to tip of snout)

or

Take a photo of the side profile of the seahorse with a ruler and calculate these measurements from the photo.

Also record and photograph a side view of the head showing:

- All facial spines and coronet
- Number of pairs of cheek spines
- Number of pairs of eye spines
- Presence/absence of nose spine, and if present, whether it is long (prominent) or short (low)
- Any other distinguishing features, e.g., spines or bumps on body, stripes on snout/tail

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**H. barbouri**  
Number of pairs of eye spines: 1 pair  
Presence/absence and length of nose spine: long  
Number of pairs of cheek spines: 2 pairs

Photo: Theophile Peeters
Key to the Seahorses
(*Hippocampus* spp.) of the East Atlantic

Does the back of the seahorse’s coronet attach smoothly to its neck?

- **Yes**: Short snout, prominent eye spines, narrow ridge-like coronet smoothly connected to neck, and rounded trunk.
  - **No**: Coronet low with overhang at the back, rounded cheek spines, prominent eye spines, and chunky body rings.

*H. hippocampus*

*H. guttulatus*

*H. algiricus*
The Short-Snouted Seahorse

Hippocampus hippocampus

- Short snout
- Prominent eye spines
- Narrow ridge-like coronet smoothly connected to neck
- Rounded trunk

Geographic range of H. hippocampus

Photo: Joke Maller

Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/)
Atlantic Seahorses

Hippocampus guttulatus

- Coronet not attached smoothly to neck
- Well-developed spines with rounded tips
- Prominent tapered eye spines
- Medium to long snout
- Often thick skin fronds on head and neck

Geographic range of H. guttulatus

Coronet not attached smoothly to neck
Prominent, tapered eye spines
Skin fronds on head and neck

Photo: Shedd Aquarium/Brenna Hernandez

Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/)
Atlantic Seahorses

Hippocampus algiricus

- Low, overhanging coronet
- Rounded cheek spines
- Prominent eye spines
- Chunky body rings
- May be covered with tiny white spots or larger brown ones

Geographic range of H. algiricus

Photo: Francisco Otero

Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/)