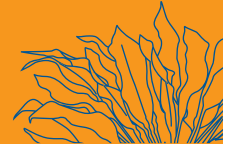




SEAHORSES of the Americas



Seahorses of the Americas

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

Masters of Disguise

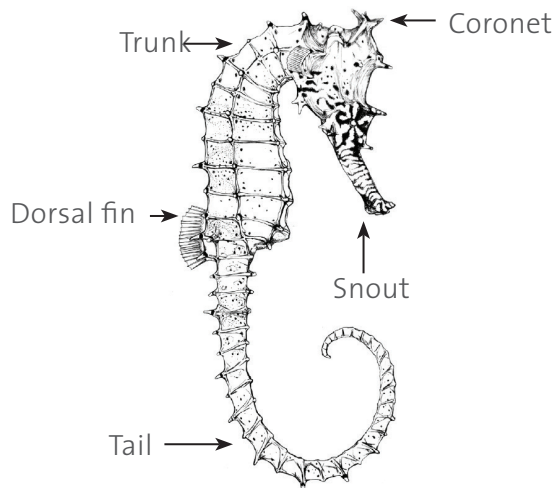
Seahorses are well-camouflaged, and individuals can be covered by seaweeds and sediments in the wild. **Color and lengths of skin filaments (“hairs”) can vary for individuals within the same species and so are NOT useful for identification.** Practice your identification skills before starting surveys.



Above: Potential seahorse habitats. Left to right: coral reef, seagrass bed, mangrove forest. Photos by Tse-Lynn Loh and Ria Tan/Wild Singapore.

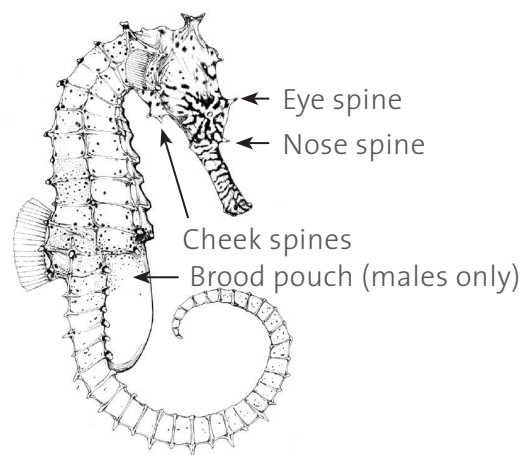
Seahorse Parts

Hippocampus barbouri



Female

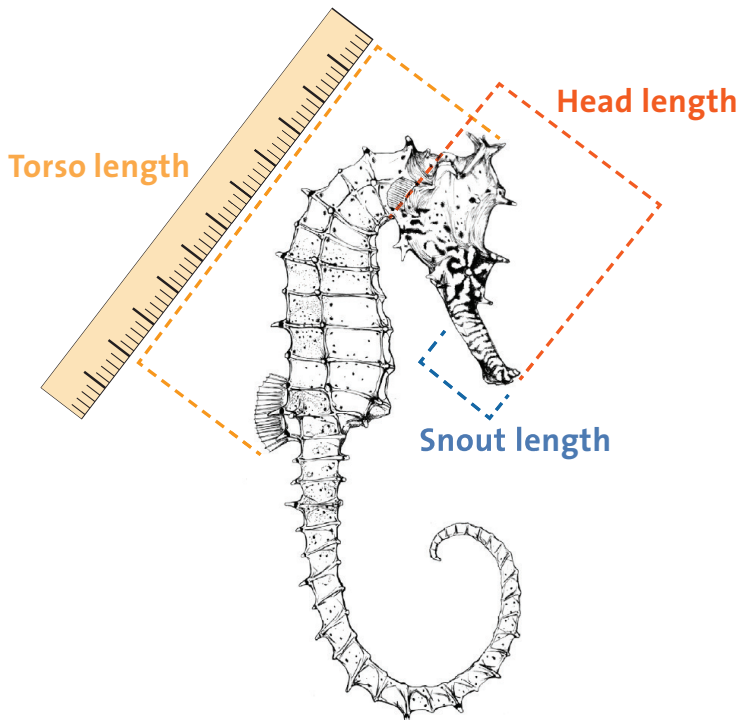
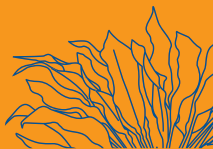
In females, the belly does not extend past the **bottom of the dorsal fin**. If you are uncertain, it is likely male.



Male



Don't Know Which Seahorse Species? How to Photograph for ID



For unknown species, record the following characteristics:

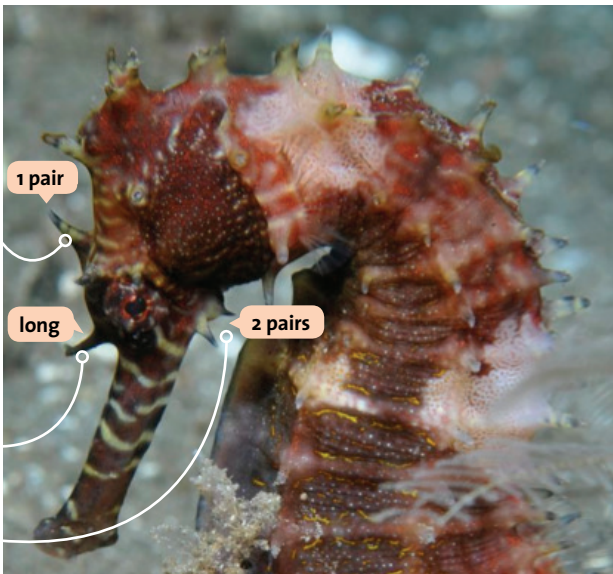
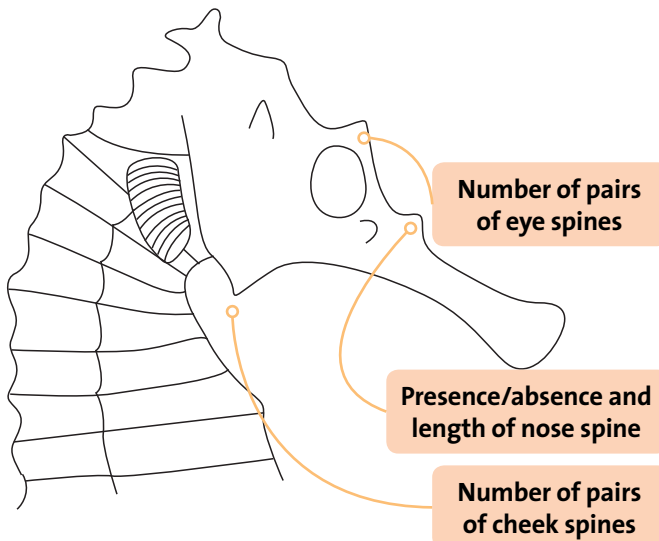
- **Torso length**
(distance from top of coronet to base of dorsal fin)
- **Head length**
(from immediately behind the operculum – the flap covering the gills – to tip of snout)
- **Snout length**
(from bump immediately in front of the eye to tip of snout)

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



H. barbouri

Photo: Theophile Peeters

Key to the Seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp.) of the Americas

What ocean was the seahorse spotted in?

Pacific

Atlantic

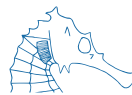
Does the species have a large columnar, knob-like coronet?



yes

no

Is the snout longer than the head?



yes

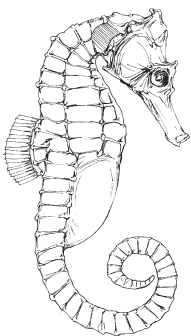


no

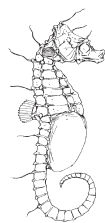
Does the seahorse have a convoluted coronet?

yes

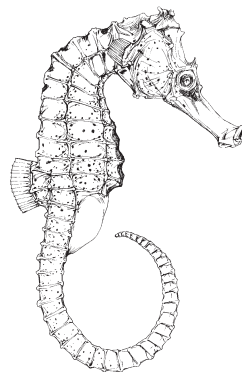
no



H. ingens
High fluted coronet, prominent eye spines. A single pair of rounded cheek spines.



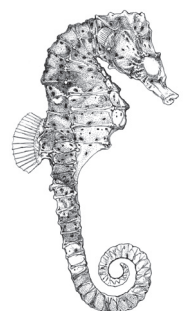
H. zosterae
Short snout, high knob-like coronet. Skin often covered in tiny warts.



H. reidi
Large, low and convoluted coronet. Double eye spines.



H. erectus
Coronet ridge-like, often with sharp spines. Double or single cheek spines. Single eye spines.

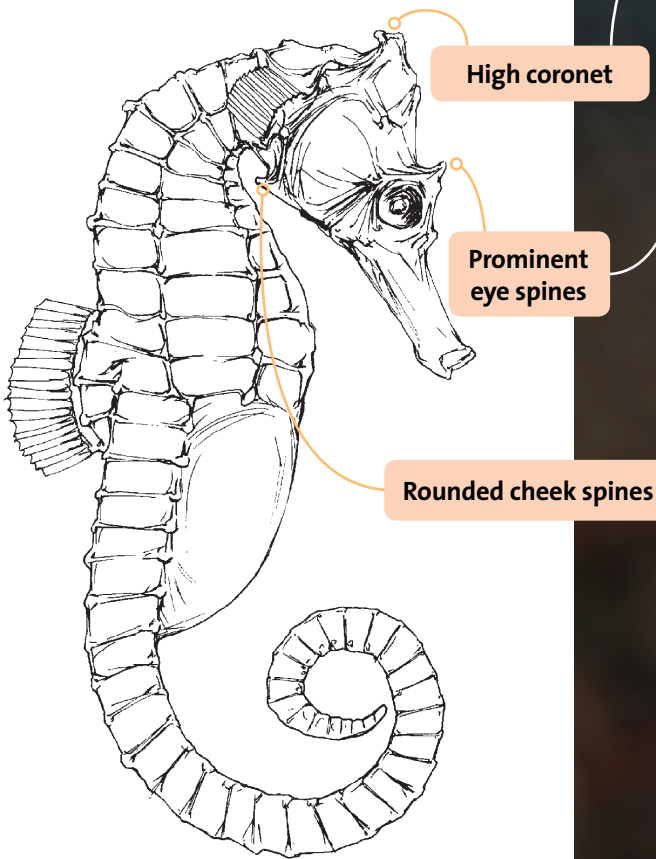


H. patagonicus
Very similar to *H. erectus*. Long tail relative to total length.

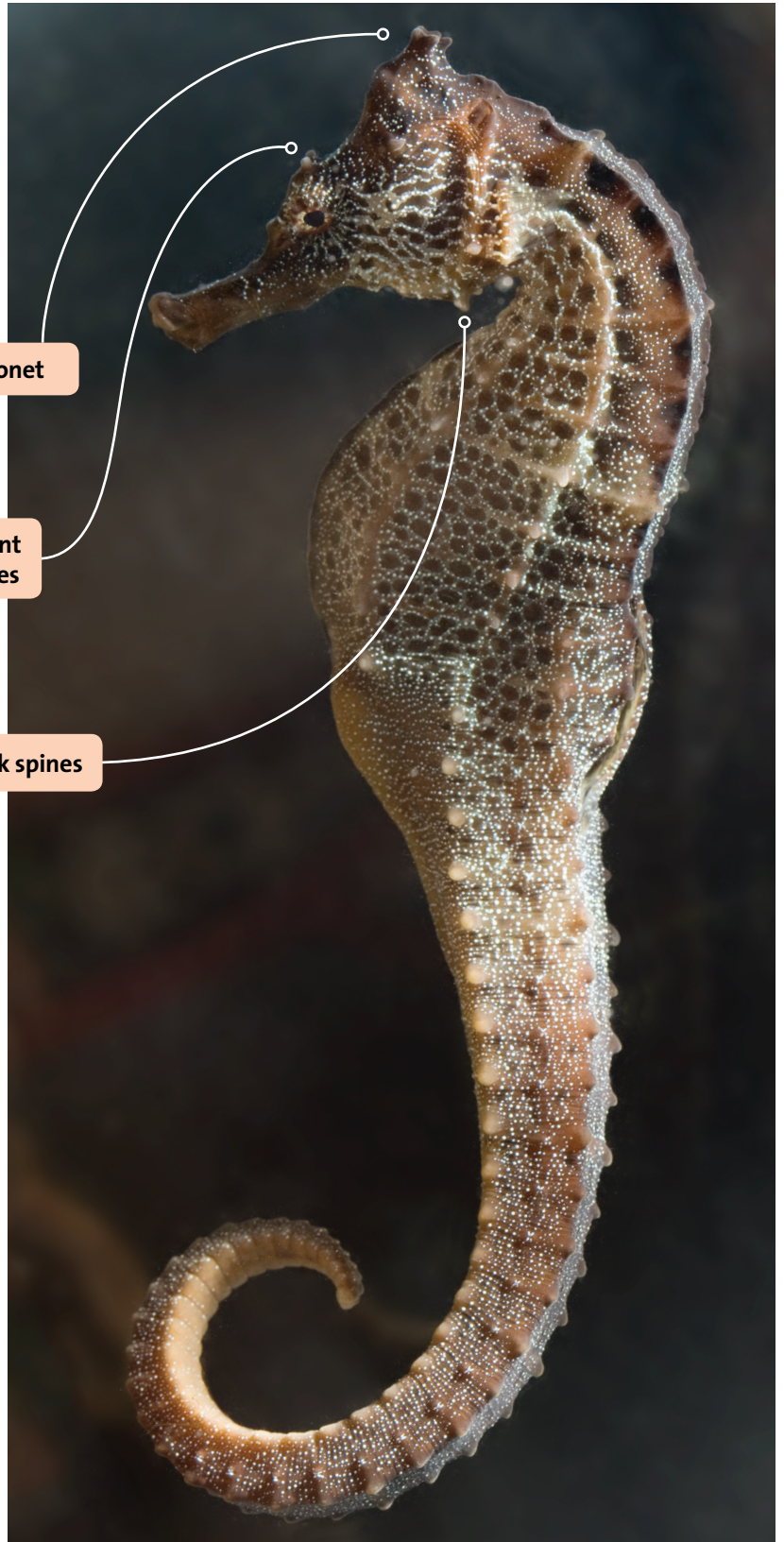
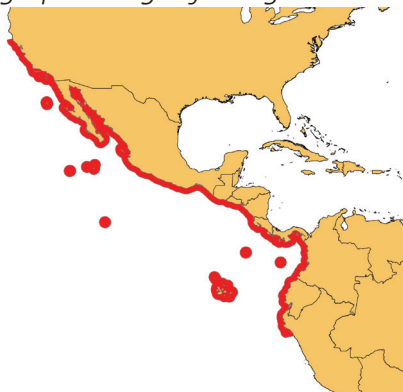
THE PACIFIC SEAHORSE

Hippocampus ingens

- Long, rounded single pair of cheek spines
- Only American seahorse native to Pacific waters
- Prominent eye spines
- Medium to high coronet



Geographic range of *H. ingens*

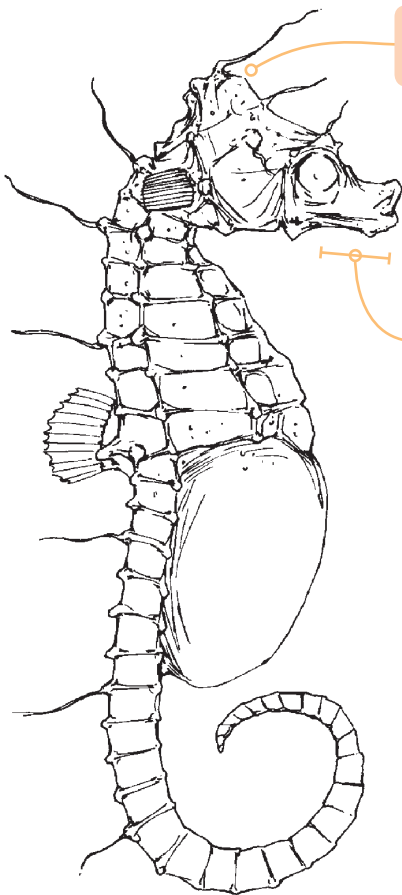


Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (<http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/>)

Photo: Shedd Aquarium/Brenna Hernandez

THE DWARF SEAHORSE *Hippocampus zosterae*

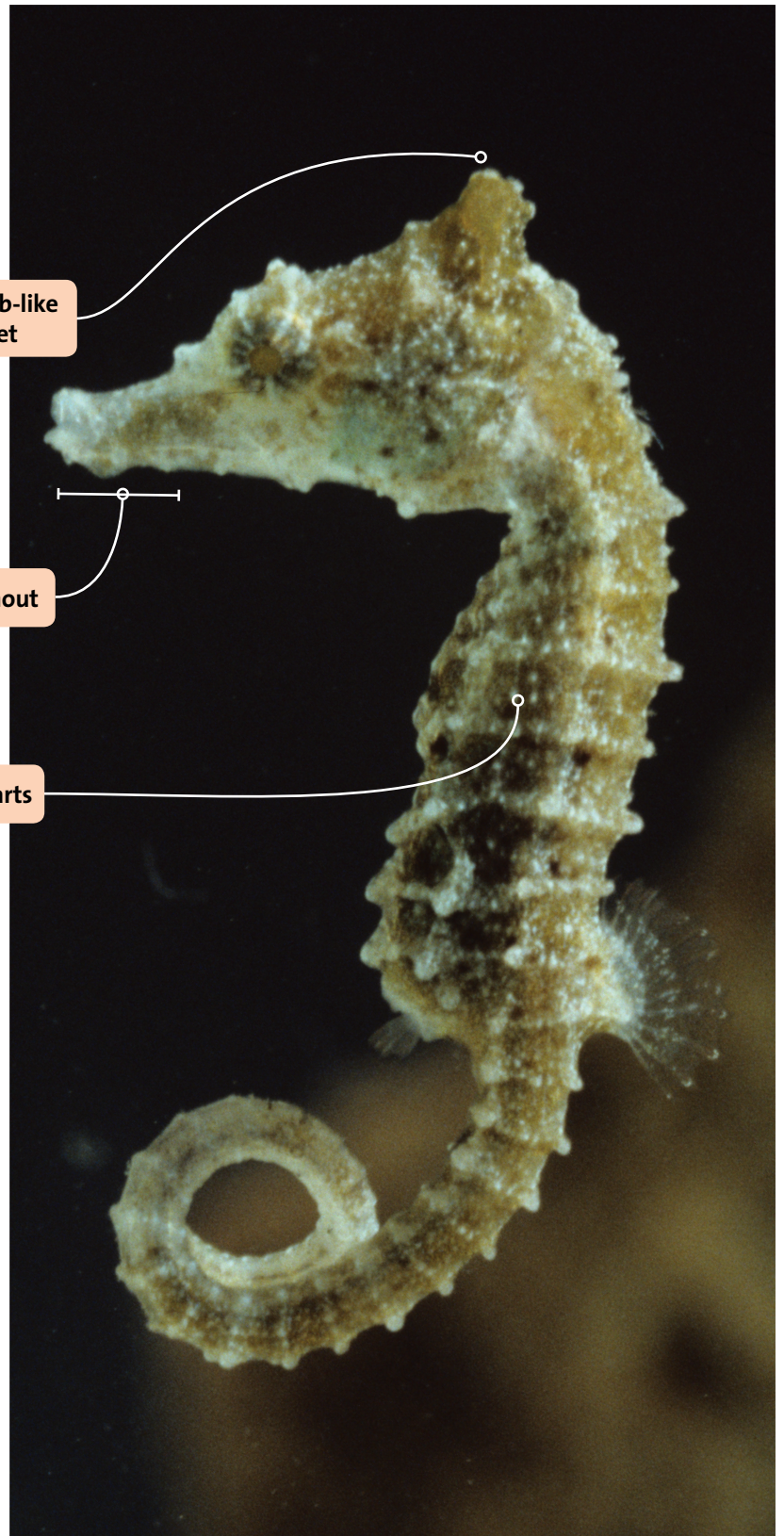
- Max overall height is 3cm
- Short snout
- High knob-like coronet
- Skin often covered in tiny warts



High, knob-like coronet

Short snout

Tiny warts



Geographic range of *H. zosterae*

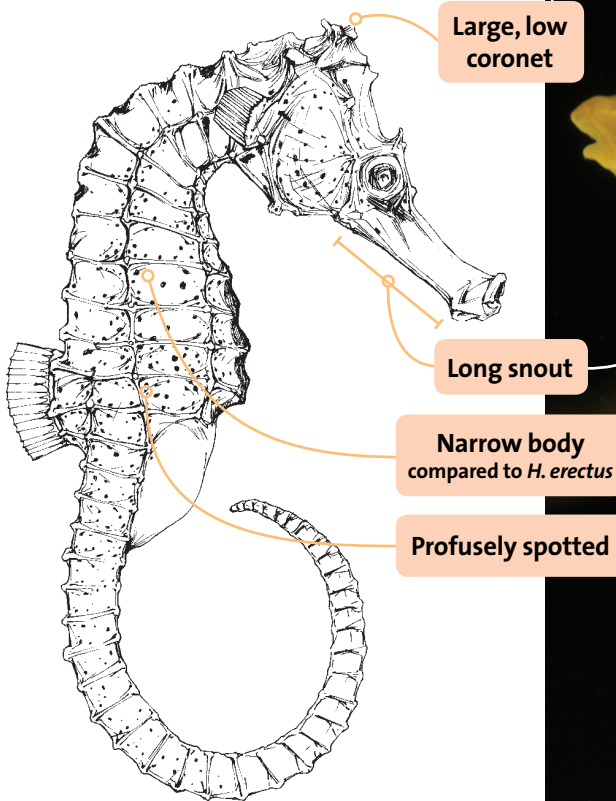


Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (<http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/>)

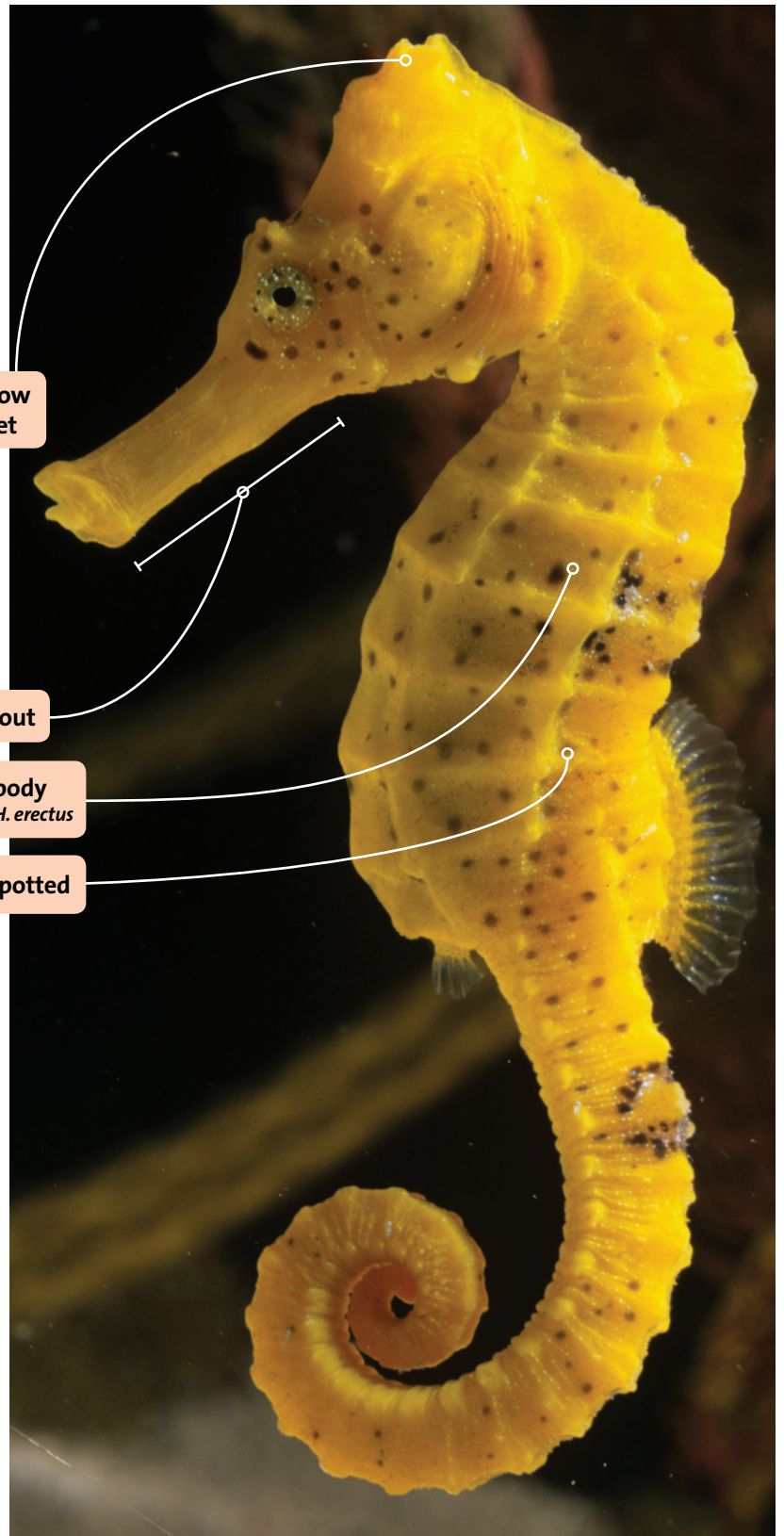
Photo: Shedd Aquarium/Brenna Hernandez

THE SLENDER SEAHORSE *Hippocampus reidi*

- Large, low and convoluted coronet
- Long snout compared to *H. erectus*
- Double eye spines
- Narrow body compared to *H. erectus*
- Often profusely spotted



Geographic range of *H. reidi*

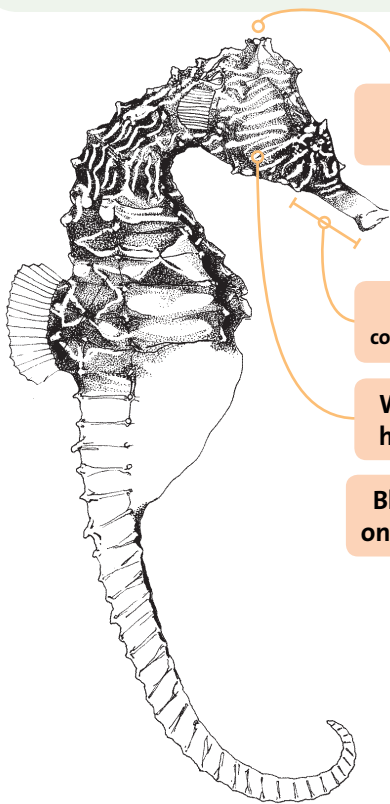


Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (<http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/>)

Photo: Shedd Aquarium/Brenna Hernandez

THE LINED SEAHORSE *Hippocampus erectus*

- Relatively short snout (compared to *H. reidi*)
- Coronet ridge-like, sometimes with sharp spines
- Double or single cheek spines
- Head and neck often with white lines
- May have blotchy saddles across back and sides

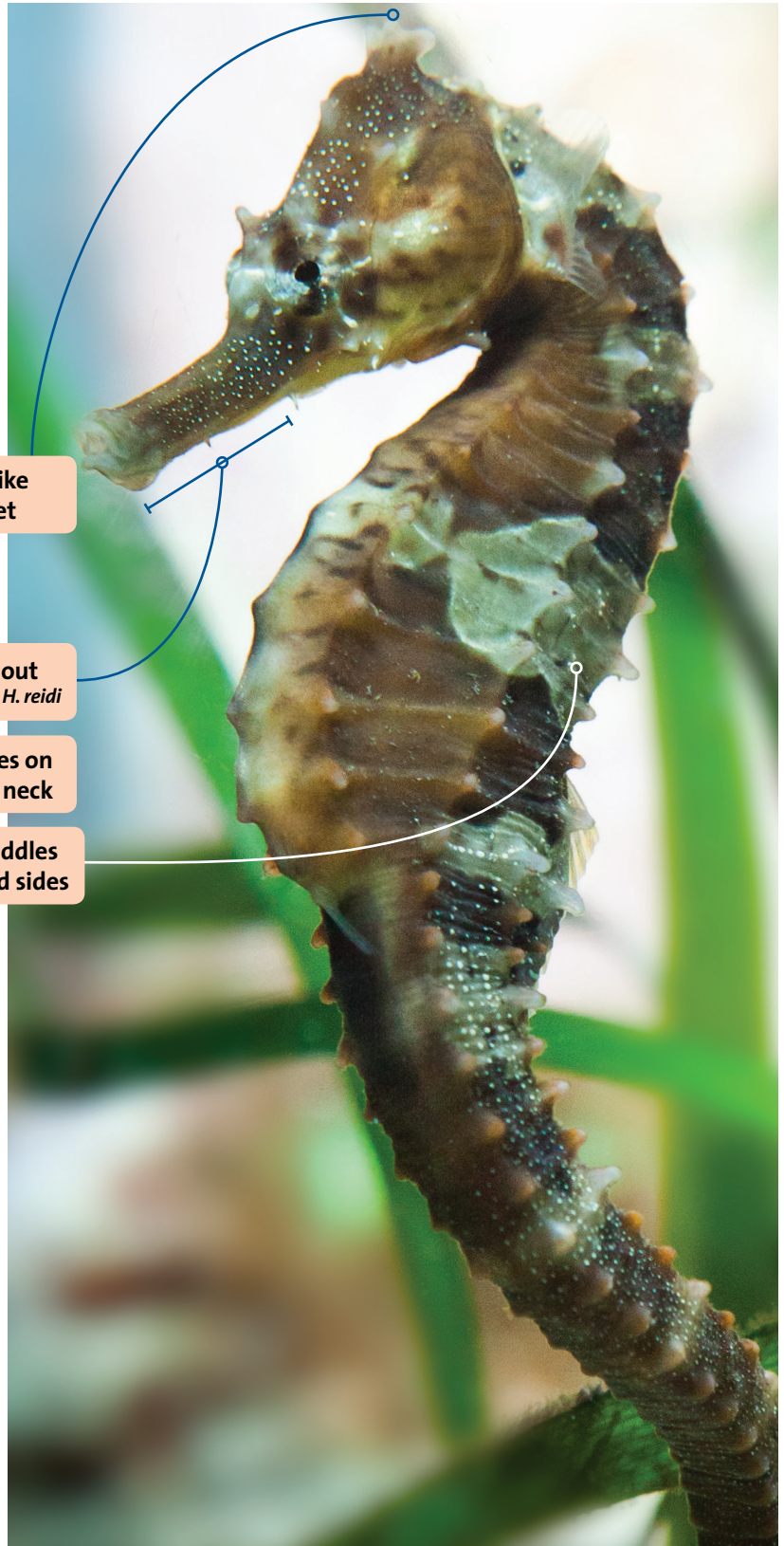


Ridge-like coronet

Short snout compared to *H. reidi*

White lines on head and neck

Blotchy saddles on back and sides



Geographic range of *H. erectus*

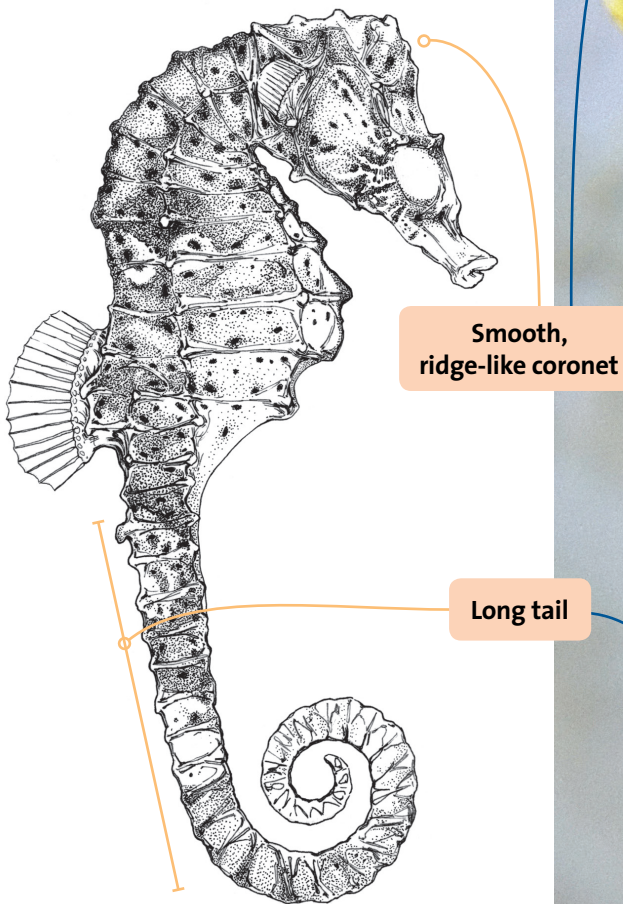


Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (<http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/>)

Photo: Shedd Aquarium/Brenna Hernandez

THE PATAGONIAN SEAHORSE *Hippocampus patagonicus*

- Similar to *H. erectus*
- Relatively smooth, ridge-like coronet
- Long tail relative to total length
- Grows up to 15 cm



Geographic range of *H. patagonicus*



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

Photo: Diego Luzzatto