



# SEAHORSES of the East Atlantic



## 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

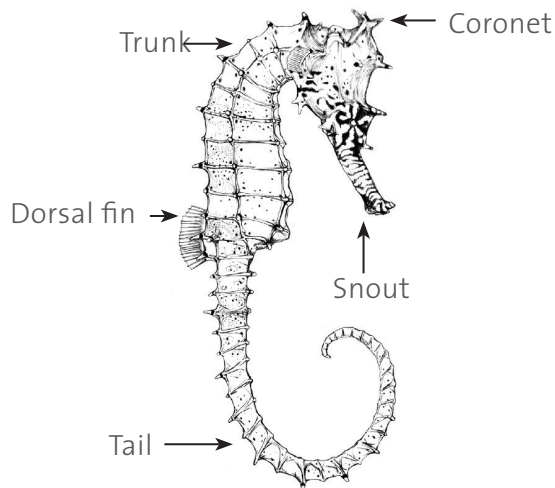
Seahorses are well-camouflaged, and individuals can be covered by seaweeds and sediments in the wild. **Color and lengths of skin filaments (“hairs”) can vary for individuals within the same species and so are NOT useful for identification.** Practice your identification skills before starting surveys.



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

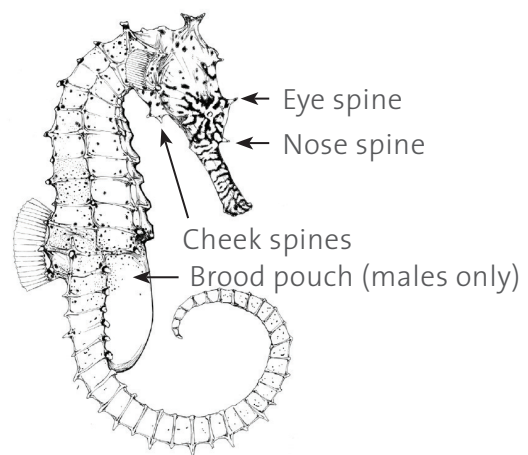
## Seahorse Parts

*Hippocampus barbouri*



### Female

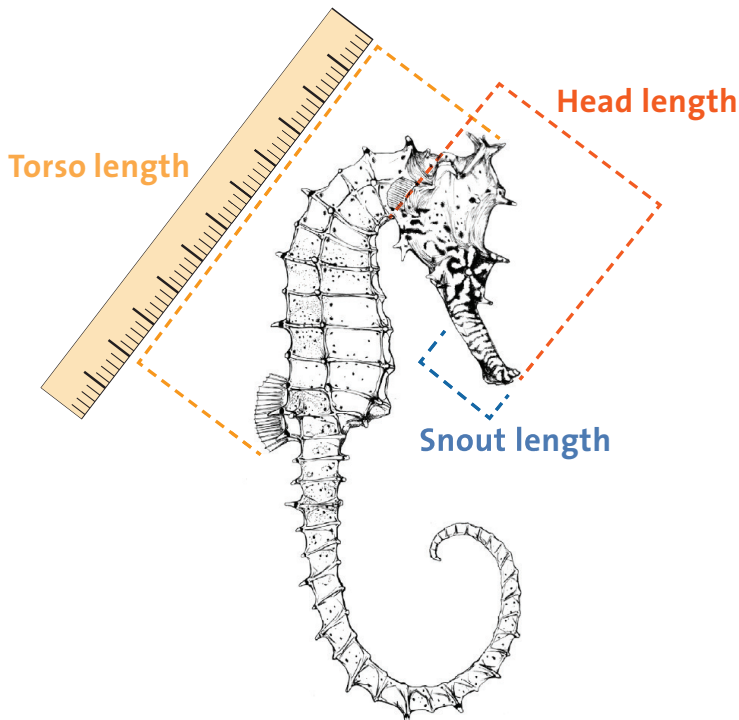
In females, the belly does not extend past the **bottom of the dorsal fin**. If you are uncertain, it is likely male.



### Male



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



For unknown species, record the following characteristics:

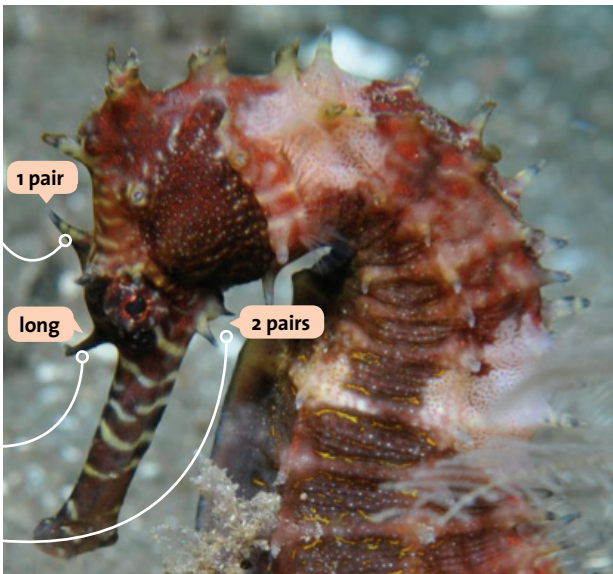
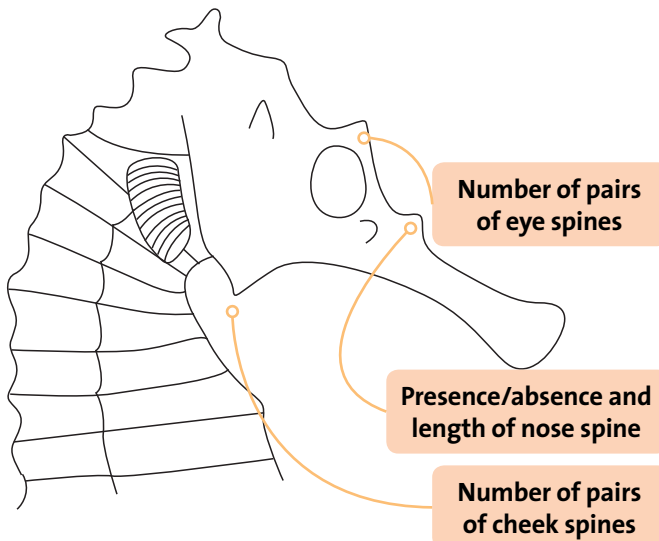
- **Torso length**  
(distance from top of coronet to base of dorsal fin)
- **Head length**  
(from immediately behind the operculum – the flap covering the gills – to tip of snout)
- **Snout length**  
(from bump immediately in front of the eye to tip of snout)

**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

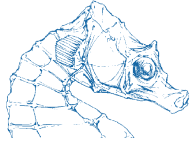


*H. barbouri*

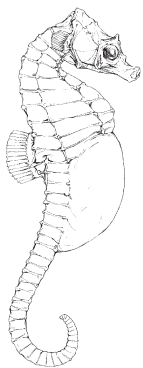
Photo: Theophile Peeters

# Key to the Seahorses (*Hippocampus* spp.) of the East Atlantic

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

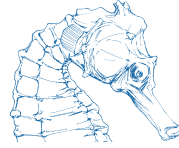


yes



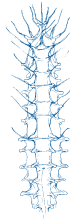
***H. hippocampus***

Short snout, prominent eye spines, narrow ridge-like coronet smoothly connected to neck, and rounded trunk.

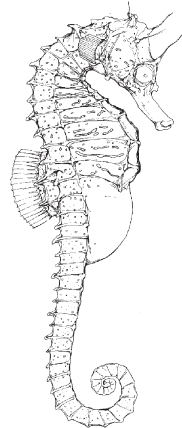


no

Does the seahorse have well-developed spines on its body?



yes

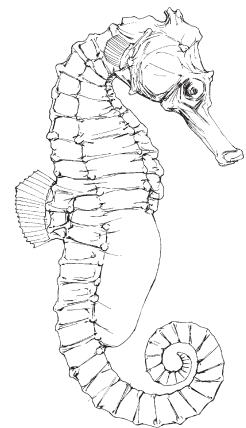


***H. guttulatus***

Coronet not attached smoothly to neck, well-developed spines with rounded tips, and prominent rounded eye spines.



no



***H. algericus***

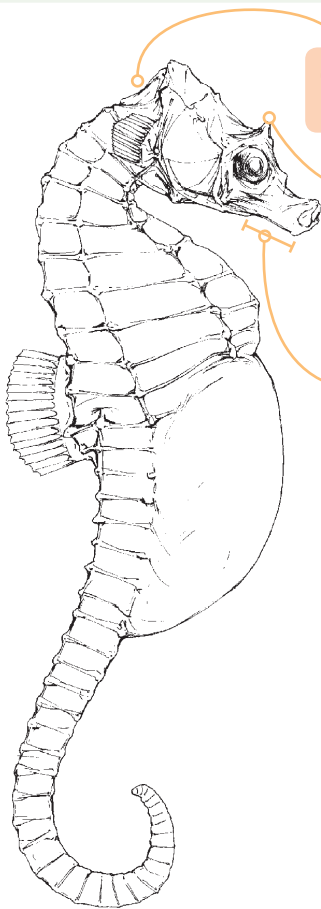
Coronet low with overhang at the back, rounded cheek spines, prominent eye spines, and chunky body rings.



# THE SHORT-SNOUDED SEAHORSE

## *Hippocampus hippocampus*

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



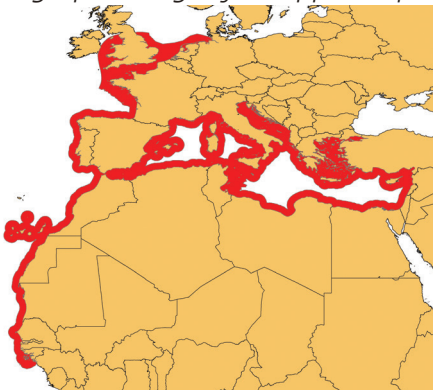
Coronet smoothly connects to neck

Prominent eye spines

Short snout



Geographic range of *H. hippocampus*



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

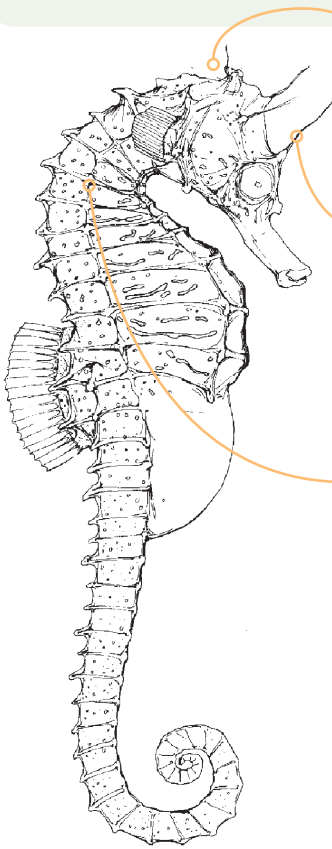
Photo: Joke Maller



# THE LONG-SNOUDED SEAHORSE

## *Hippocampus guttulatus*

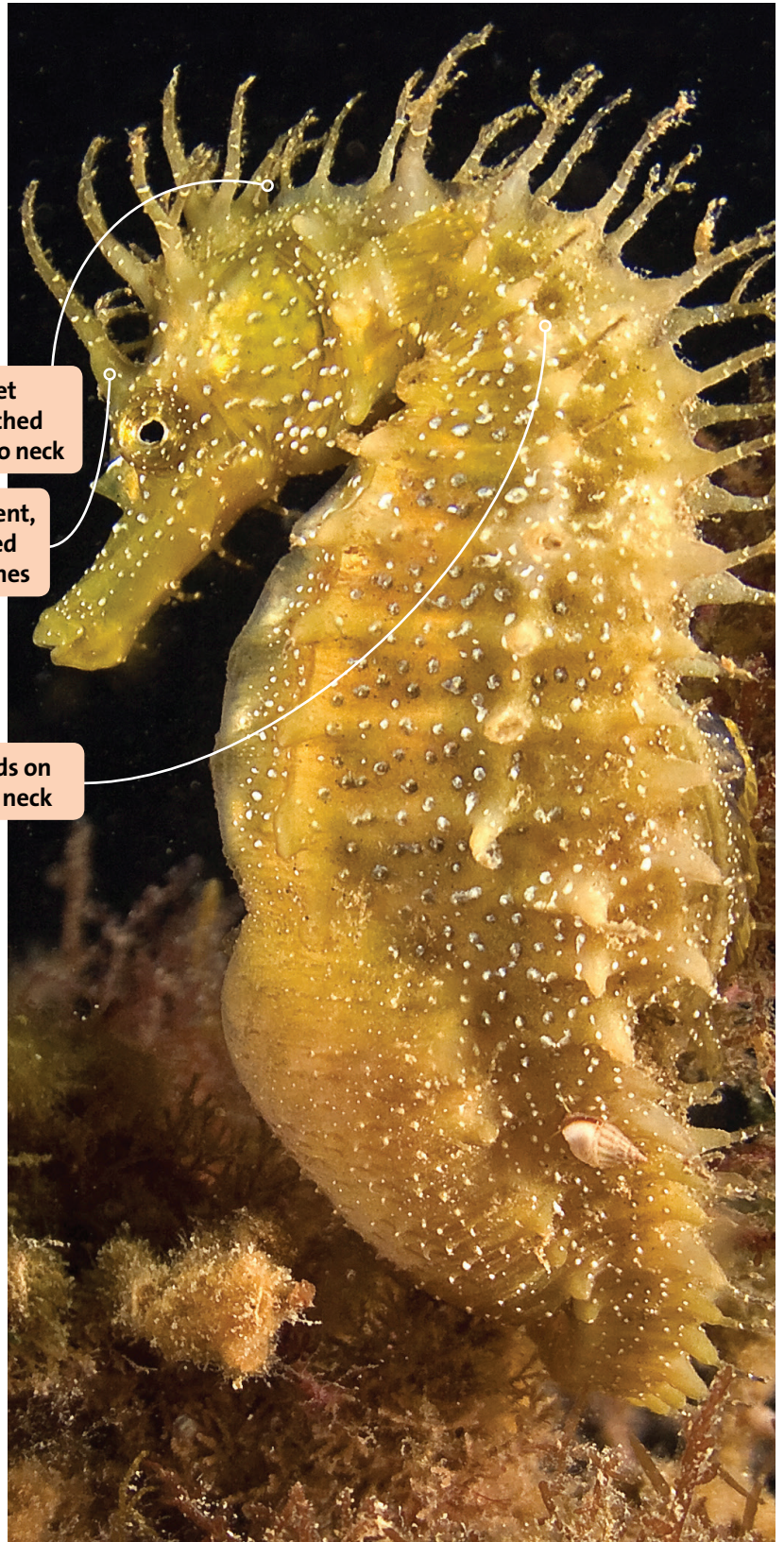
- Coronet not attached smoothly to neck
- Well-developed spines with rounded tips
- Prominent tapered eye spines
- Medium to long snout
- Often thick skin fronds on head and neck



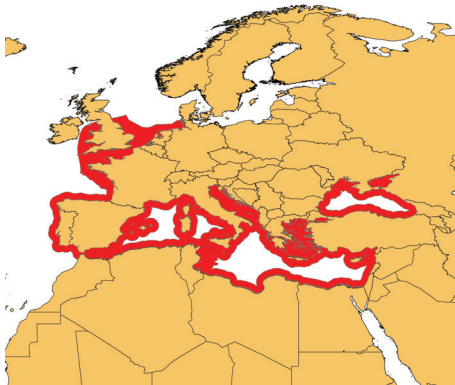
Coronet  
not attached  
smoothly to neck

Prominent,  
tapered  
eye spines

Skin fronds on  
head and neck



Geographic range of *H. guttulatus*



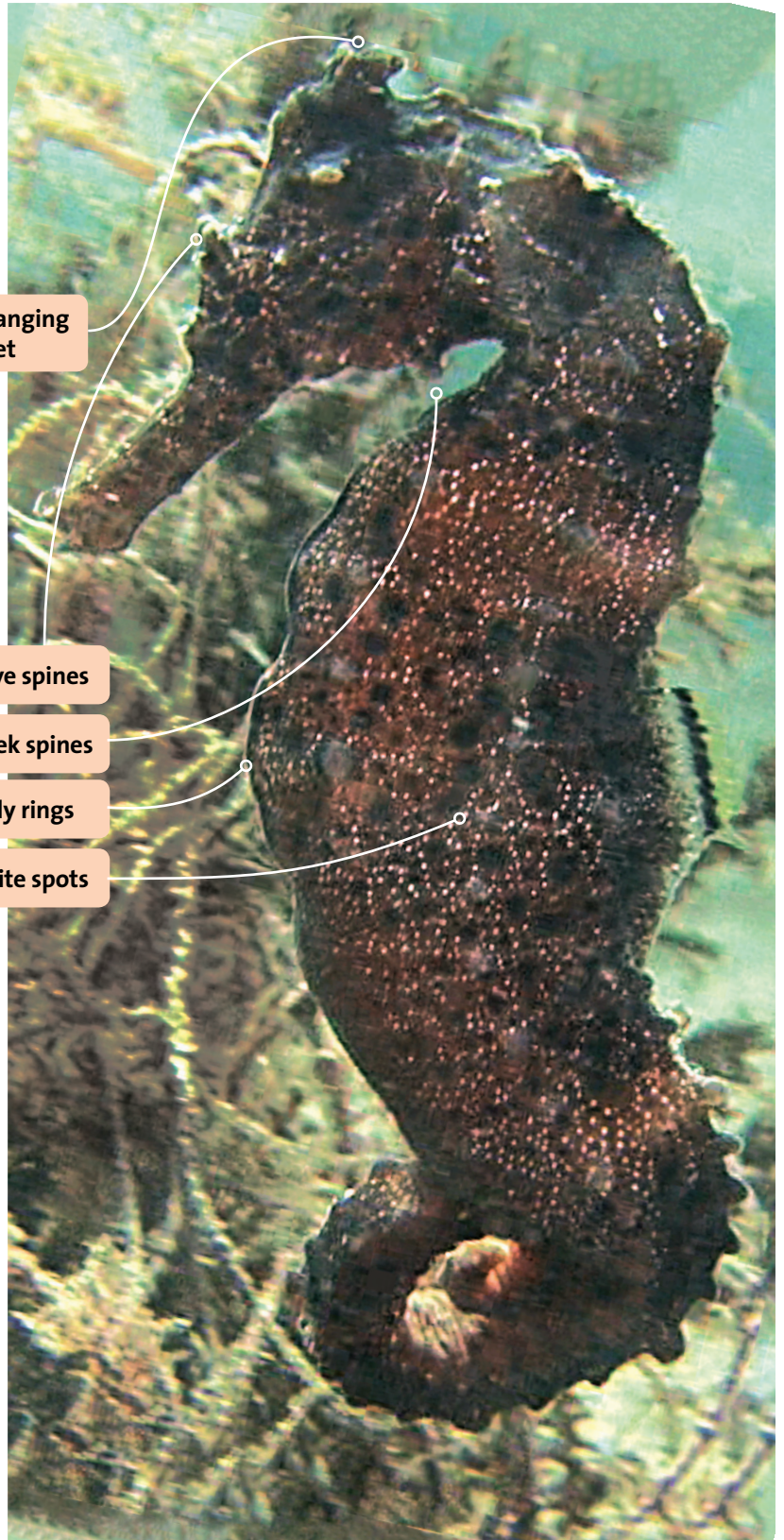
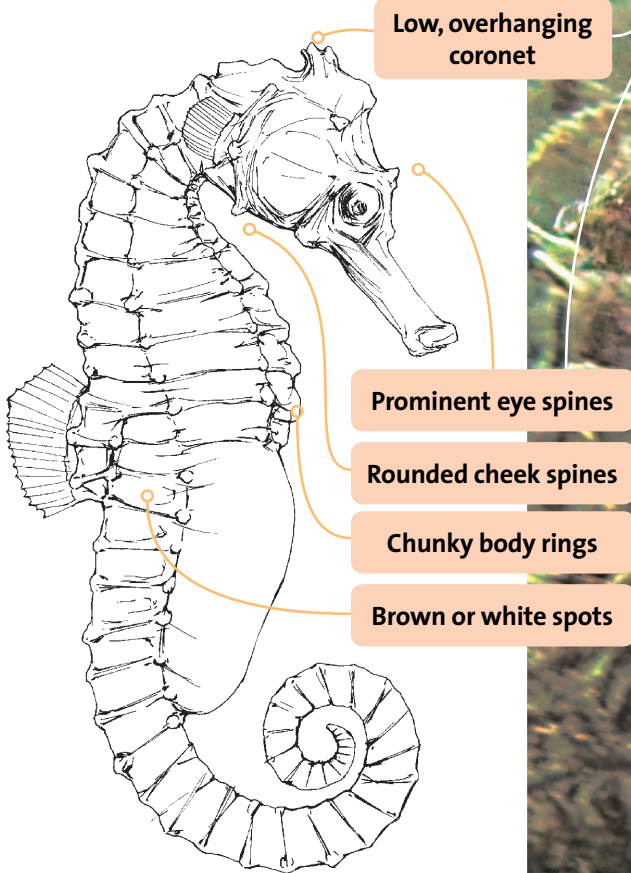
Drawing courtesy of Laurence Richardson (<http://www.naturalhistoryartist.com/>)

Photo: Shedd Aquarium/Brenna Hernandez

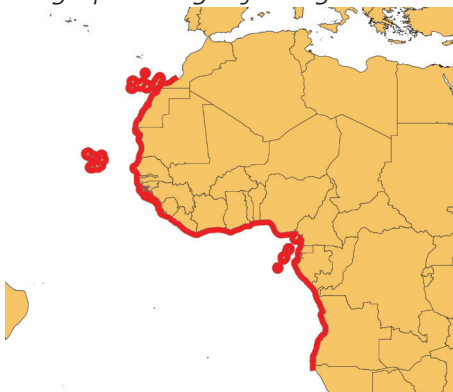


# THE WEST AFRICAN SEAHORSE *Hippocampus algiricus*

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



Geographic range of *H. algiricus*



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

Photo: Francisco Otero