

# IUCN SSC Seahorse, Pipefish and Stickleback Specialist Group

2016-2017 Report



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## Chair

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## Number of members

25

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## Mission statement

To promote the long-term conservation of the world's Syngnathiform (seahorses, pipefishes, and their relatives) and Gasterosteiform (sticklebacks and their relatives) fishes through the illumination and alleviation of threats to wild populations and their ocean habitat.

## Main activities by Key Priority Area (2016 & 2017)

### Barometer of life

#### ■ Red List

i. Completed Red List assessment and reassessment for the 323 species under the remit of the IUCN SSC SPS SG. (KSR #1)

#### ■ Research activities

i. Created definitive taxonomy and biogeography of seahorses, published as a 66 pages monograph in *Zootaxa*. This will be adopted as the global standard, through IUCN Red Listings and as the CITES reference. Lourie et al. 2016, in *Zootaxa* 4146 (1): 001-066. (KSR #43)

ii. Enhanced participation in the citizen science website [www.iseahorse.org](http://www.iseahorse.org) with 1,390 new observations, bringing the total to 3,200; 165 new unique observers bringing the total to 695. We continue to expand our Trends Monitoring Program and have established a network of over 35 National Seahorse Experts and Ambassadors from 19 countries who empower others to take action and generate conservation change.

## Bolster work at national scales

### ■ Capacity building

i. Brought together researchers and scientists to discuss current status and threats to seahorses in India. (KSR #17)

ii. Mobilize Chinese stakeholders (fishing communities, government leaders, NGO's, citizens, and school children) to protect seahorses and their habitat through training, education and outreach. Engage and alert Chinese organizations, institutions and conservationists to threats faced by protected seahorses and China's ocean by non-selective and destructive fishing and together map a way forward. (KSR #17)

### Capacity building

#### ■ Capacity building

i. Provided Red List training for ~ 20 participants of the 2017 meeting of researchers and other professionals working on syngnathid fishes. (KSR #5)

### Communications

#### ■ Communication

i. Information on current marine conservation issues and syngnathid populations, including threats and conservation status, accessible to syngnathid experts and other interested parties. (KSR #28)

ii. Alert India's policy makers, NGO's and researchers to the appalling forms of annihilation trawling and urge them to take action to better manage their coastal resources. (KSR #33)

iii. Delivered an array of resources in the form of a toolkit to help Chinese organizations and institutions to protect the country's threatened seahorses and to mitigate the desertification of its oceans. In the toolkit we identify practical strategies to address various marine-conservation issues impacting seahorses and the ocean. (KSR #28)



Professor Heather Masonjones underwater with *Hippocampus reidi* at her study site in Sweetings Pond, Eleuthera, Bahamas  
Photo: Shane Gross



The Endangered, *Hippocampus whitei*, White's Seahorse  
Photo: David Harasti

#### ■ Scientific meetings

- i. Presentations at the 3rd SyngBio meeting provided updates on the status, ecology and current research on syngnathid species globally offering an opportunity for capacity building and collaboration amongst colleagues. (KSR #28)

#### Conservation action

##### ■ Conservation activities

- i. The SPS SG held a conservation planning workshop that involved 16 members and seven invited observers from 12 countries, providing a great opportunity to share information and develop relationships. Together, we drew up a global strategic plan to facilitate, generate and mobilize conservation action. We identified four geographic regions of greatest concern globally, in which to focus conservation action and developed two cross cutting themes for our work, on (i) better enforcement of existing laws and (ii) removal of perverse incentives. (KSR #15)
- ii. Protection for a critical seahorse population in Sweetings Pond (lagoon) on the island of Eleuthera in the Bahamas, in collaboration with the Bahamas National Trust. (KSR #27)

##### ■ Research activities

- i. Assisted and provided frontline field support for an IUCN SPS SG member in Argentina. (KSR #32)

#### Increasing diversity of SSC

##### ■ Membership

- i. Recruited new members to increase diversity and enhance the capacity of the SPS SG to support syngnathids.

##### Policy

##### ■ Policy advice

- i. Detailed report on the CITES Review of Significant Trade (RST) processes for seahorses, the first executed for fully for marine fishes. Policy document presented to the 17th meeting of the CITES Conference of the Parties (CoP17) provided best practices to support conservation of species in the RST process. (KSR #27)

##### ■ Research activities

- i. In October 2017, Project Seahorse, acting as the IUCN SSC SPS SG, carried out a formal investigation of whether ban on dried seahorse exports are being implemented, focusing on Hong Kong SAR, the largest known importer of dried seahorses. This report will be created into a CITES information document to be presented at the CITES Standing Committee meeting in 2018. (KSR #32)

#### ■ Technical advice

- i. Worked with Viet Nam to address CITES-imposed suspension of exports for *Hippocampus kuda*. Helped fill gaps in Viet Nam's capacity and knowledge of its seahorse biology, fisheries, aquaculture and trade. Assisted Viet Nam to implement fully and effectively the Convention's export restrictions on seahorses working towards exports that are sustainable, legal and ethical. (KSR #27)

#### Acknowledgements

The SPS SG benefits from support to Project Seahorse, acting as the SPS SG. Project Seahorse is hugely grateful to our long-time major partner in marine conservation, Guylian Belgium Chocolates and to our faithful supporters at the Langar Foundation. We received funding to complete the IUCN Red List assessments from the IUCN and Synchronicity Earth. Support for seahorse conservation initiatives in the Bahamas came from the Indianapolis Prize (Indianapolis Zoo) and in China from the Disney Conservation Fund. Project Seahorse also thanks our host institutions, the University of British Columbia in Canada and Zoological Society of London in the UK, who provide support for the Chair and Project Seahorse activities.



## **Targets for the quadrennium 2017-2020**

### **Barometer of life**

Conservation activities: determine priority DD species.

Red List: (1) monitor and evaluate priority species (redo Red List assessments); (2) redo Red List Assessments for priority DD species.

Research activities: (1) marshal obscure/grey information on DD species; (2) promote research agenda for all species; (3) collate new data and knowledge.

### **Capacity building**

Proposal development and funding: funding for SPS SG programme officer and meetings.

Scientific meetings: catalyse joint meeting with Specialist Groups for other marine taxa.

Synergy: (1) tighten links with other IUCN units; (2) develop strategic partnerships/ synergies with multiplier organizations.

### **Communications**

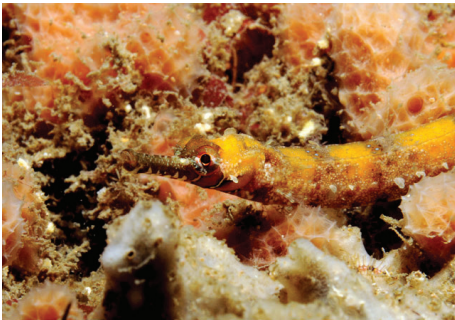
Communication: (1) develop outreach capacity for syngnathid conservation issues; (2) create synopsis of issues for donors, policy makers and the public; (3) deploy social media campaign; (4) create a taking action toolkit; (5) create a set of communication tools for SPS SG.

Scientific meetings: hold annual meetings of the SPS SG.

Synergy: (1) collaborate with Aquariums; (2) collaborate with multiplier organizations.



Members and invited observers of the IUCN SSC Seahorse, Pipefish and Stickleback Specialist Group at the conservation planning workshop held in Tampa, US  
Photo: Heather Masonjones



Girdled pipefish, *Festucalex cinctus*, recently assessed as Least Concern on the IUCN Red List  
Photo: David Harasti

### Conservation action

Conservation activities: (1) priority action statement for *Hippocampus capensis* (EN - South Africa); (2) priority action statement for *Hippocampus whitei* (EN - Australia); (3) priority action statement for *Syngnathus watermeyerii* (CR - South Africa); (4) priority action statement for *Micropphis pleurostictus* (EN - Philippines); (5) priority action statements for VU species.

Technical advice: develop urgent action response capacity.

### Increasing diversity of SSC

Capacity building: mentor next generation leaders/succession planning.

Membership: grow SPS SG membership in strategic ways by taxon, region, discipline, etc.

### Policy

Communication: catalyse campaign to effect change in SE Asian marine environments.

Conservation activities: monitoring and evaluation for SE Asian marine environments.

Policy advice: (1) select priority regions in which to promote greater implementation of rules and laws that affect syngnathids; (2) create scoping document on implementation for most relevant rules and laws that affect syngnathids in: Southeast Asian marine, South African estuarine, India and Southeast Asian freshwater and Brazil and Argentina marine; (3) disseminate scoping document to resource managers and policy makers; (4) complete matrix on perverse incentives that affect syngnathids in SE Asian marine environments; (5) complete scoping document on perverse incentives for SE Asian marine environments.

### Projected impact for the quadrennium 2017-2020

The SPS SG will seize these four years to understand and help reduce pressures on syngnathids in at least three geographic areas – Southeast Asia, South African and Atlantic South America – that are home to species of particular conservation concern. We will do this through integrated research, management support and policy development. We plan a special effort to urge reduction in perverse incentives (such as fuel subsidies) and to foster enhanced enforcement of existing laws. We hope other Specialist Groups will join us in promoting such changes, which would be of broad benefit. At the same time, we will be making a real effort to reduce the number of our species that are assessed as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List by expanding our knowledge base. These four years will further see us grow our membership, with respect for diversity of sex, ethnic background, taxonomic focus and technical experience. We are particularly keen to engage youth and non-scientists to add to our effectiveness. Using all members, we plan to raise the profile of our species to help grow the constituency of their supporters.

### Summary of activities (2016-2017)

Key Priority Area ratio: 7/7

Key Priority Areas addressed:

- Barometer of life (3 activities)
- Bolster work at national scales (2 activities)
- Capacity building (1 activity)
- Communications (4 activities)
- Conservation action (3 activities)
- Increasing diversity of SSC (1 activity)
- Policy (3 activities)

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 5, 15, 17, 27, 28, 32, 33, 43

Resolutions 2016 WCC: 016, 021, 025, 047

KSR: Key Species Result