

IUCN SSC Seahorse, Pipefish and Seadragon Specialist Group

2019 Report



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Chair

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Location/Affiliation

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Number of members

28

Social networks

Facebook: Seahorse, Pipefish and Seadragon Specialist Group

Instagram: IUCNSeahorse

Twitter: @IUCNSeahorse

Website: www.iucn-seahorse.org



Mission statement

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

Projected impact for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

The Seahorse, Pipefish and Seadragon Specialist Group (SPS SG) will seize these four years to understand and help reduce pressures on syngnathids in at least three geographic areas – Southeast Asia, South Africa 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.

Targets for the 2017-2020 quadrennium

Assess

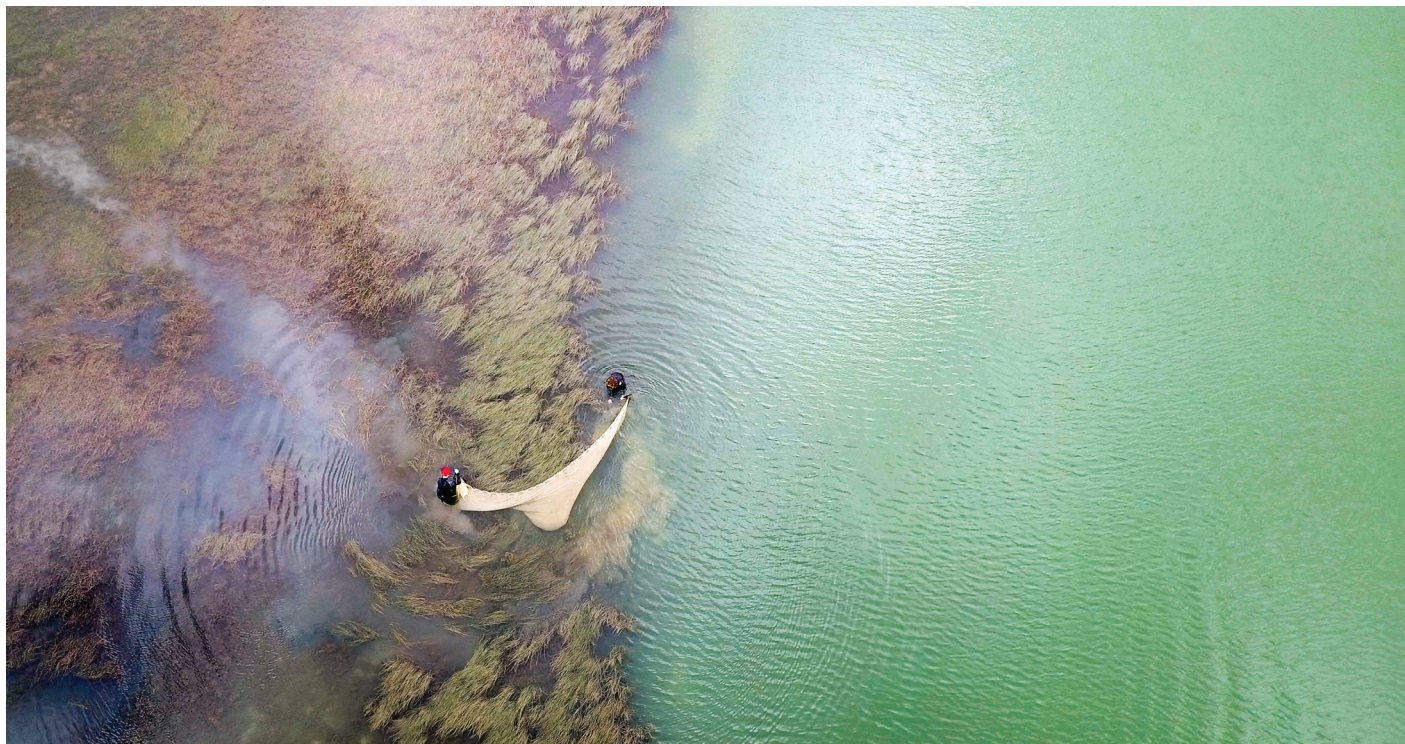
Red List: (1) monitor and evaluate priority species (redo Red List assessments); (2) redo Red List assessments for priority Data Deficient species.

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

Plan

Planning: (1) priority action statement for *Hippocampus capensis* (Knysna Seahorse; Endangered – South Africa); (2) priority action statement for *Hippocampus whitei* (White's Seahorse; Endangered – Australia); (3) priority action statement for *Syngnathus watermeyeri* (Estuarine Pipefish; Critically Endangered – South Africa); (4) priority action statement for *Microphis pleurostictus* (Endangered – Philippines); (5) priority action statements for Vulnerable species; (6) monitoring and evaluation for Southeast Asian marine environments; (7) determine priority Data Deficient species.

Policy: (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 the following regions: 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 Southeast Asian marine environments; (5) complete scoping document on perverse incentives for Southeast Asian marine environments.



Network

Capacity building: mentor next generation leaders/succession planning.

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

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

Synergy: (1) collaborate with aquariums; (2) collaborate with multiplier organisations; (3) tighten links with other IUCN units; (4) develop strategic partnerships/synergies with multiplier organisations.

Technical advice: develop urgent action response capacity.

Communicate

Communication: (1) catalyse campaign to effect change in Southeast Asian marine environments; (2) develop outreach capacity for syngnathid conservation issues; (3) create synopsis of issues for donors, policy makers and the public; (4) deploy social media campaign; (5) create a taking action toolkit; (6) create a set of communication tools for the SPS SG.

Scientific meetings: (1) catalyse joint meeting with Specialist Groups for other marine taxa; (2) hold annual meetings of the SPS SG.

Activities and results 2019

Assess

Red List

i. Draft assessments were produced for the priority Data Deficient species, *Hippocampus hippocampus* (Short-snouted Seahorse) and *H. guttulatus* (Long-snouted Seahorse). (KSR #1, 32)

Research activities

i. Obscure and grey information were collated to re-assess two Data Deficient species, *Hippocampus hippocampus* and *H. guttulatus*. (KSR #1, 32)

ii. We promoted research agendas for seven species in four countries by connecting Specialist Group members with iSeahorse Ambassadors and local conservation groups to engage in seahorse monitoring and conservation outreach in Greece, Mexico, Mozambique and Portugal. (KSR #32)

iii. Continued monitoring and focused research continues for our Endangered seahorse species, *H. capensis* and *H. whitei* in South Africa and Australia, respectively. (KSR #32)

iv. The research agenda was enhanced for the Critically Endangered *Syngnathus watermeyerii* in South Africa through funds received by the National Geographic Conservation Grant. (KSR #32)

v. We collated new survey and population data from ongoing research with Specialist Group members through collaborations with small NGOs and local interest groups in South Africa, Mozambique, Tanzania, Portugal and Greece. (KSR #12)

vi. SPS SG members published a paper on describing a new species of Pygmy seahorse, *Hippocampus japapigu*, in Japan.

vii. An SPS SG member described a new species of Pipefish in Argentina, *Leptonotus vincentae*, named after our Chair, Amanda Vincent.

viii. We embarked on a seahorse trade survey in the Philippines with colleagues from Zoological Society of London – Philippines to document changes in the catch and trade of seahorse post-CITES. Results were documented in a University of British Columbia Fisheries Centre Research Report and were communicated to the Philippines Government to affect and guide policy for the sustainable management of seahorse catch and trade in the Philippines.

Plan

Planning

i. The priority action statement for *H. whitei* was the basis for and aided in the creation of a New South Wales Department of Primary Industries Priorities Action Statement, promoting the recovery of this species in New South Wales, Australia. (KSR #15)

ii. We supported, provided endorsement and helped propel an SPS SG member to secure funds from the National Geographic Society Conservation Grant to conduct research on the Critically Endangered Estuarine Pipefish, *Syngnathus watermeyerii*, in South Africa. (KSR #15)

Hippocampus guttulatus
in the Ria Formosa lagoon, Portugal
Photo: Miguel Correia



iii. An expert in the region has been identified and is ready to conduct preliminary surveys and population assessments of the Endangered *Microphis pleurostictus*. This is dependent on funding. (KSR #15)

Policy

i. We have embarked on an ambitious plan to extend the creation of a scoping document on implementation to include all relevant rules and laws that affect syngnathids at the national level in all countries where syngnathids occur through an IUCN Internal Grant. (KSR #26)

ii. We performed literature reviews to gather all available information on perverse subsidies that affect syngnathids in eighteen countries (Argentina, Brazil, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Myanmar, Nicaragua, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Uruguay, Viet Nam). (KSR #26)

iii. We developed high-level scoping documents on perverse incentives for Southeast Asian marine environments in six key countries (Brazil, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mexico, Philippines and Thailand). (KSR #26)

iv. We created a summary or synopsis on perverse incentives that affect syngnathids. (KSR #26)

v. Project Seahorse, acting as the SPS SG, collaborated with the Maldives, Monaco, Sri Lanka and US governments to address ongoing challenges in CITES implementation for seahorses. Document 27 and its decisions received unanimous support and were passed by the CITES committee at the 18th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES (CoP18) in Geneva, Switzerland. (KSR #26)

vi. We developed and submitted an IUCN World Conservation Congress (WCC) motion to be voted on at the IUCN WCC: Motion 111 – Conservation of seahorses, pipefishes and seadragons (family Syngnathidae). (KSR #26)

Network

Capacity building

i. Dr Sarah Foster was appointed as the Global Trade Officer and Dr Paula Carlson as the focal point for ex situ expertise for the IUCN SSC Seahorse, Pipefish and Seadragon Specialist Group. (KSR #17)

Synergy

i. Specialist Group members collaborated with SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium on a new conservation programme to breed the Endangered *Hippocampus whitei* (in a closed system), tag, release, and monitor in Sydney Harbour, Australia. (KSR #25, 29)

ii. SPS SG consulted with the Birch Aquarium and provided ideas and suggestions for key messages to be displayed in a new seadragon/ seahorse exhibit, and discussed opportunities for collaboration on *ex situ* syngnathid research. (KSR #29)

iii. SPS SG partnered with 4Ocean, increasing our outreach capacity and sharing message of seahorse conservation. (KSR #29)

iv. SPS SG collaborated with Oceanário de Lisboa and their Red List Officer to complete Red List assessments of two seahorse species. (KSR #29)

v. We have an ongoing partnership with Guylian Belgium Chocolates to help plan and execute a biennial Guylian Seahorses of the World photo competition. (KSR #29)

vi. Connections made with IUCN units through Amanda's role as Chair of the IUCN SSC Marine Conservation Committee include: IUCN SSC Chair's office, Conservation Planning Specialist

Group, Climate Change Specialist Group, Snapper, Seabream and Grunt Specialist Group, Shark Specialist Group and others during the IUCN SSC Steering Committee meeting, through ocean themed workshop/discussion for SSC leaders in Abu Dhabi in October 2019. (KSR #29)

vii. We supported and provided endorsement for an SPS SG member to secure funds from the National Geographic Society Conservation Grant to conduct research on the Critically Endangered Estuarine Pipefish, *Syngnathus watermeyer*, in South Africa.

viii. We drafted and submitted an IUCN WCC Motion co-sponsored by 16 organisations (NGOs and government agencies) from 10 countries around the world: Motion 111 – Conservation of seahorses, pipefishes and seadragons (family Syngnathidae).

Technical advice

i. We connect SPS SG members with members of our citizen science programme iSeahorse (Ambassadors and Trends Monitors) as well as general public requests to address pressing conservation concerns and provide them with tools and resources to increase their knowledge and capacity to respond. (KSR #18)

Communicate

Communication

i. Country specific briefing documents on the status of syngnathids have been drafted for Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mozambique, and Peru, that will be shared and posted onto the IUCN SSC SPS SG website. (KSR #28)

ii. We collaborated with the Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online to address trade in wildlife products through e-commerce, social media and tech company platforms by devel-



Leptonotus vincentae, a new pipefish species from Argentina described by IUCN SSC SPS member, Diego Luzzatto, and named after our very own Chair, Amanda Vincent
Photo: Diego Luzzatto

Pair of Honshu Pipefish, *Doryrhamphus japonicus*, Ambon, Indonesia
Photo: Richard Smith - OceanRealmlmages.com

oping a harmonised wildlife policy framework. The framework provides simplified language for advertising and content policy teams as well as enforcement teams for companies to adopt, aligning wildlife policy at an international level. (KSR #28)

iii. Project Seahorse acting as the SPS SG published 14 blogs varying in topic from highlighting and sharing knowledge of seahorse species to field notes and commentaries on our research project collaborations and policy work (including seahorse exploitation and trade and CITES). In addition, we regularly post syngnathid information on our social media pages (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram). (KSR #28)

iv. Toolkits were created to communicate and raise awareness for: (1) Ria Formosa seahorses in Portugal, (2) seahorse exploitation and trade in the Philippines, and (3) a CITES toolkit for seahorses in trade. (KSR #28)

v. A taking action toolkit has been drafted and is ready for review. (KSR #28)

Scientific meetings

i. A virtual Specialist Group meeting was held in January 2019 where members updated progress on the strategic plan and developed priority action points for the upcoming year. (KSR #28)

ii. A focused meeting on the release of captive bred animals was held where a working group was created to develop guidelines and protocols for the release of captive bred syngnathids. (KSR #28)



Acknowledgements

The SPS SG benefits from support to Project Seahorse, acting as the core of 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. Sincere thanks to Oceanário de Lisboa and team member Catarina Fonseca for their tremendous help in drafting Red List assessments of two seahorse species. 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 some SPS SG and Project Seahorse activities.

Summary of activities 2019

Components of Species Conservation Cycle: 4/5

Assess	9	■■■■■■■■
Plan	9	■■■■■■■■
Network	10	■■■■■■■■■■
Communicate	7	■■■■■■■

Main KSRs addressed: 1, 12, 15, 17, 18, 25, 26, 28, 29, 32

Resolutions: WCC-2016-Res-016, WCC-2016-Res-021

KSR: Key Species Result