

Citizen scientists spot rare seahorse in Canadian waters

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A photo of a lined seahorse taken by 'citizen scientists' Nédia Coutinho and Martin Roy. Credit: UW Distribution

The University of British Columbia's Project Seahorse announced today a rare documented sighting of a seahorse in Canadian waters.

The sighting comes to light as a result of iSeahorse.org, the new [citizen science](#) initiative created by Project Seahorse. Two divers recently uploaded a photograph of the lined seahorse (*Hippocampus erectus*) that they spotted off St. Margaret's Bay, Nova Scotia.

"This is a thrilling discovery," says Amanda Vincent, director of Project Seahorse. "These charismatic and mysterious animals are so highly

cryptic – and, in many places, so threatened – that we often have to be very lucky to find them."

The divers, Nédia Coutinho and Martin Roy, owners of UW Distribution, an underwater imaging company, spotted the seahorse during a routine dive.

"I was obviously not looking for a seahorse but when I saw it I could not believe my eyes," says Coutinho. "I was so excited, even without knowing that it's not common around Nova Scotia. I have dived on the Great Barrier Reef in Australia and in the Caribbean and this is the first time I have ever seen a seahorse."

Seahorses are found in coastal waters around the globe, from northern Europe to the Indian Ocean and from Korea to New Zealand. They are threatened by harmful fishing practices and overfishing, with tens of millions of animals caught and traded for use in traditional Chinese medicine, aquarium display, and as curios. Loss of their habitats also poses problems.

"Seahorses face so many challenges that they desperately need new allies," explains Vincent. "Globally, there are fewer than 15 scientists studying seahorses in the wild, which is why citizen science initiatives like iSeahorse are so important, and why divers like Nédia and Martin are so integral to their conservation."

About the lined seahorse (*Hippocampus erectus*)

- The lined seahorse grows to a maximum adult length of about 19 cm.
- The species' known range includes coastal North and South America, the Caribbean, and Gulf of Mexico.
- The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species designates the lined

seahorse as 'Vulnerable' to extinction.

- The lined seahorse can develop elaborate skin fronds as a form of camouflage.

About iSeahorse

iSeahorse is a [website](#) and [iPhone app](#) that harnesses the power of "[citizen scientists](#)"—anyone, anywhere in the world who sees a seahorse in the wild—to improve our understanding of these animals and protect them from overfishing and other threats. Anyone, from divers to fishers, scientists to people on beach vacations can use the app to upload photos and observations to iSeahorse. These citizen scientists can help identify seahorse species and even advocate for their protection in their ocean neighbourhoods.

Scientists from Project Seahorse and seahorse experts around the world will use this vital information to better understand seahorse behaviour, species ranges, and the threats seahorses face. They will use this knowledge to improve [seahorse](#) conservation across the globe.

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Provided by University of British Columbia

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