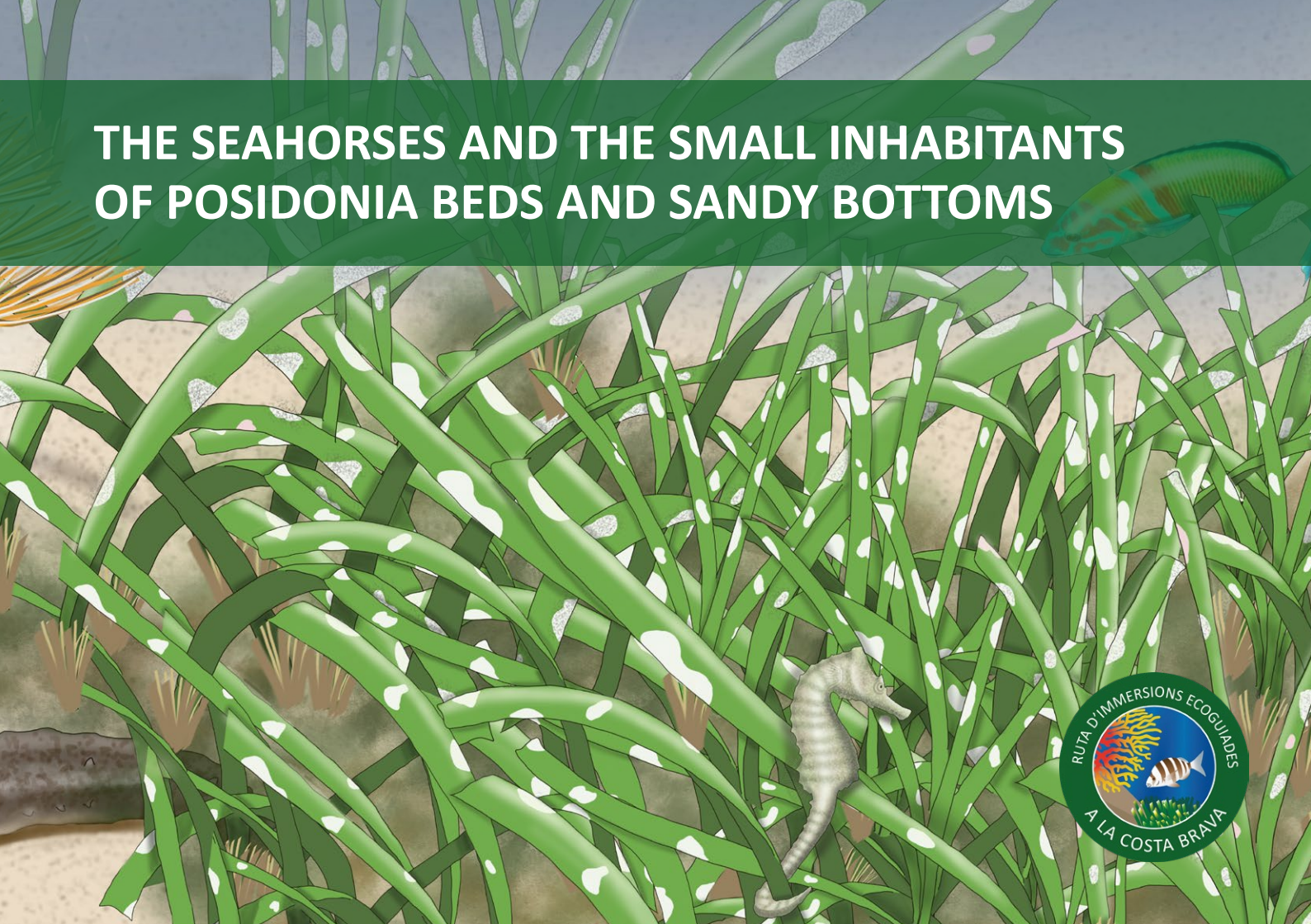


THE SEAHORSES AND THE SMALL INHABITANTS OF POSIDONIA BEDS AND SANDY BOTTOMS



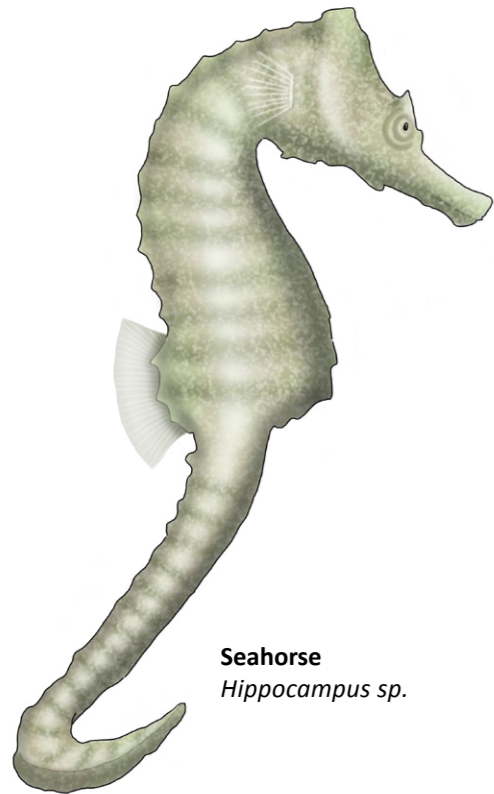


THE SEAHORSES AND THE SMALL INHABITANTS OF POSIDONIA BEDS AND SANDY BOTTOMS

At first glance, the posidonia beds and the sandy bottoms seem very homogeneous. If we just take a look around, it may seem that there isn't much life there, as it is hidden out of sight of any possible predators.

The animals aim to go unnoticed using all kinds of strategies: burying themselves, camouflaging themselves, searching for refuges... However, if we observe it in detail we can find anything from snails to shells, sea cucumbers, fish, worms and many other species.

One of the inhabitants of the sandy-bottomed seabed and the posidonia beds that often goes unnoticed, is the sea horse, a surprising and very attractive animal for divers.



Seahorse
Hippocampus sp.

THE SEAHORSES

Seahorses are fish, but they have a peculiar morphology that helps them to go unnoticed, with a mobile tail part that allows them to attach themselves to plants, algae and other animals or rocks.

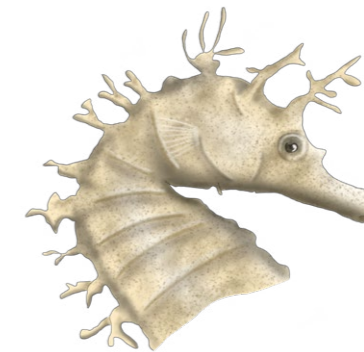
The dorsal fin is what it uses to move by making a wavelike / vibratory movement.

Its head reminds us of the profile of a horse's head, with a mouth adapted to sucking in small invertebrates, they usually stay still hanging onto something with their tail, waiting for some prey to come close enough to be sucked in.

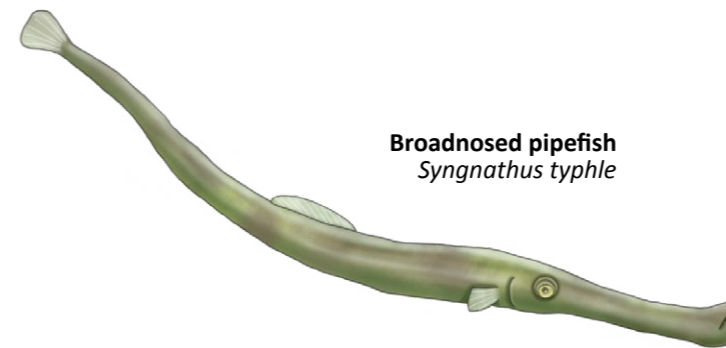
They go unnoticed thanks to the dorsal protuberances, but especially because they can change colour by mimicking the colour of the seabed.

THEY AREN'T ALL SEAHORSES

On the Costa Brava we find two species of seahorse, the *Hippocampus hippocampus* and *Hippocampus ramulosus* and we also have pipefish, a fish that reminds us of seahorses, although it doesn't have the frontal torsion or the prehensile tail, which is just as surprising when (being very patient) we discover them camouflaged amongst the posidonia.



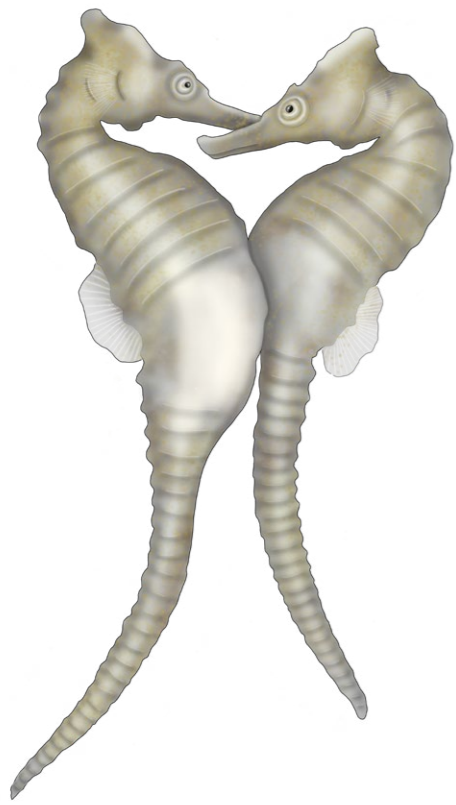
Hippocampus ramulosus



Broadnosed pipefish
Syngnathus typhle



Hippocampus hippocampus

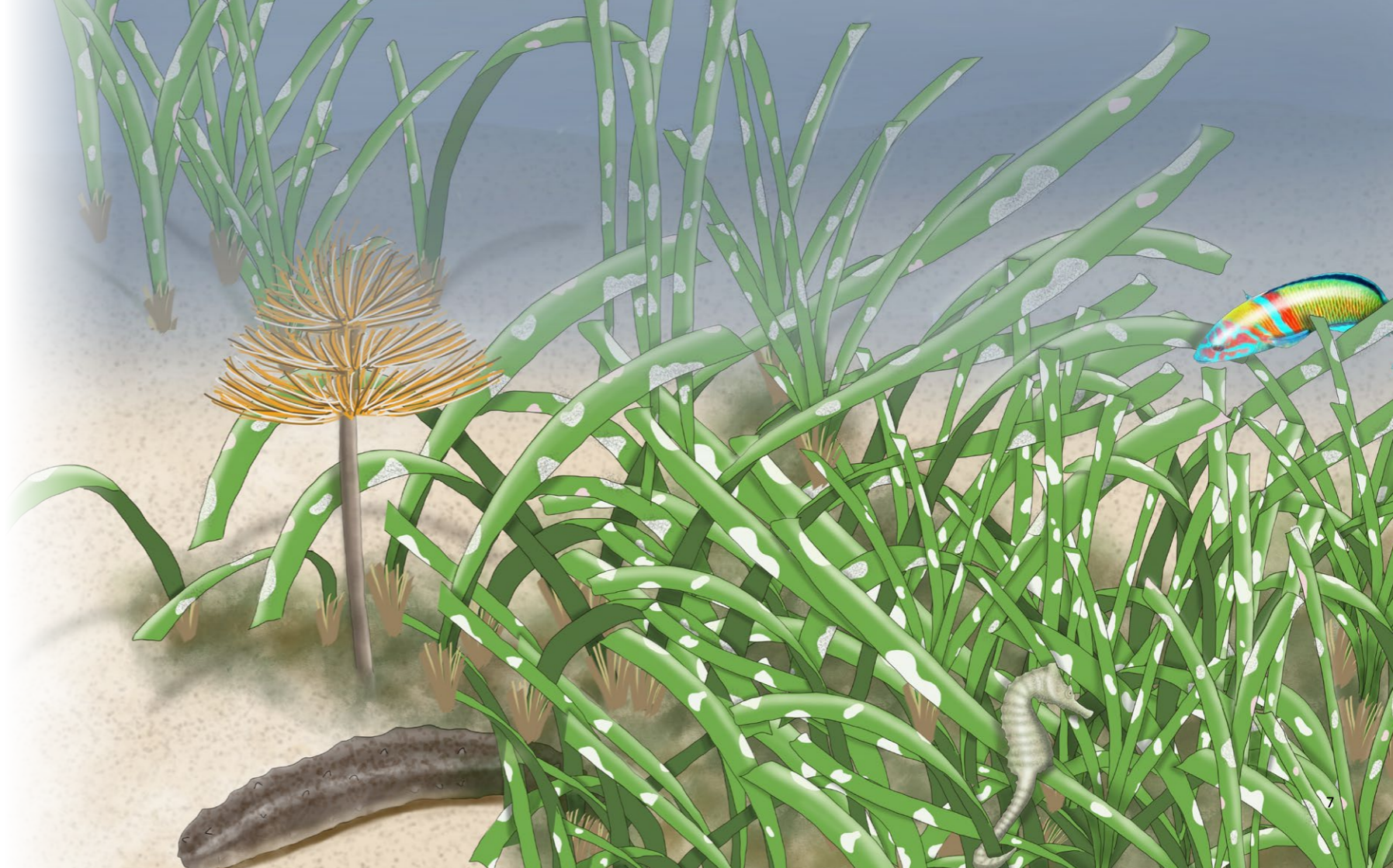


UNUSUAL REPRODUCTION CYCLE

In addition to its strange shape, seahorses have an unusual reproduction cycle.

The female lays her eggs in an abdominal pouch the male has, and it is him who keeps the eggs in its belly throughout their development until they hatch.

When the time comes, the male expels the new generation from its pouch through characteristic spasmodic movements and from here it is popularly said that the males “give birth” to their offspring.



WHERE THEY CAN BE SEEN

The two species of seahorses are not found in the same place.

The *Hippocampus hippocampus* prefers the sandy bottoms and can be found attached to the structures that stand out from the homogeneous background, for example: a sand gorgonian, a spirograph growing on a shell, attached to some seaweed or lost fishing gear...

The *Hippocampus ramulosus* prefers to live on hard bottoms, camouflaged between algae, posidonia or a gorgonian protruding from the seabed.

Like pipefish, which are also camouflaged amongst the posidonia, they are difficult to observe, but they are quite territorial and there are areas where seahorses can traditionally be located; however, finding them always depends on luck and the observer's ability.



HOW TO SEE THEM

First of all, remember that luck will be an important factor, if you do not find them right away, keep looking.

Depth is a key factor, and although they can live in a wide range of depths, they are usually observed in shallow areas and calm waters, so we are more likely to find them between a depth of 3 and 15 metres.

The best way to look for them is to pay close attention to the small shapes that stand out in between the algae and then gradually get closer without touching the seabed.

If you are on a sandy bottom, look for unique factors that stand out on the landscape: fallen branches, an old shell of a snail, abandoned fishing gear, the remains of some gorgonians piled up between the ripples of the sand or in nooks and crannies which are well-protected from the waves.

ALSO...

Although seahorses are spectacular animals, while looking for them you are sure to discover a multitude of aquatic life that goes unnoticed by most divers and that causes the dives on the posidonia meadows and the sandy-bottomed seabeds to always be unique and interesting for a good observer.

Your guides will help you find and identify nudibranchs, crabs, prawns, polychaetes, snails, echinoderms and other organisms with whom they share the space and that will fill each dive with new discoveries.

PRECAUTIONS

Both the seahorses and the pipefish are very fragile animals, observing them or even searching for them near the seabed, forces the diver to be extra careful to avoid damaging them and having an impact on the habitat:

- We should never touch or handle them.
- We must keep a prudent distance from the seabed to ensure we don't damage other organisms or the habitat itself.
- We should not use the flash when taking pictures, as the high intensity of light bothers them.





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