

Echeneis naucrates (Slender Sharksucker)

Family: Echeneidae (Remoras)

Order: Perciformes (Perch and Allied Fish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)

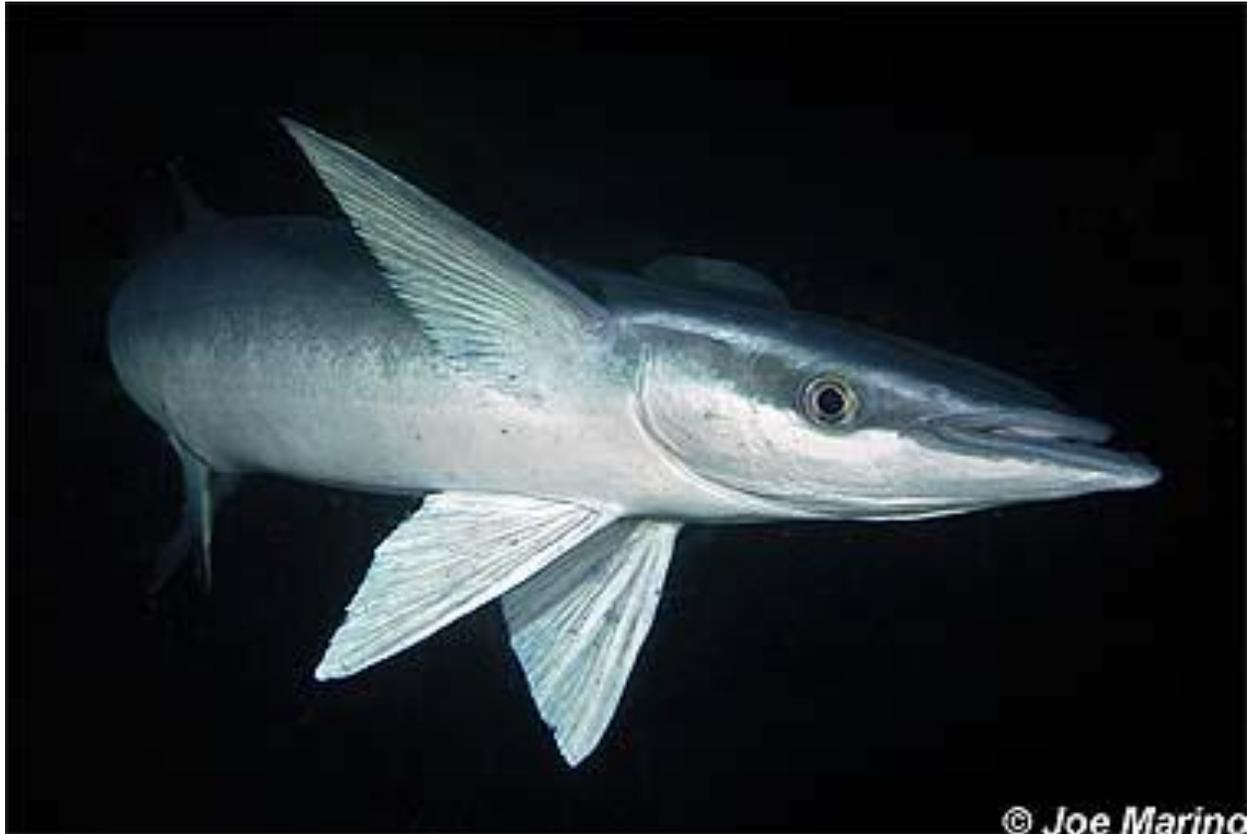


Fig. 1. Slender sharksucker, *Echeneis naucrates*.

[<https://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/discover/species-profiles/echeneis-naucrates/>, downloaded 6 March 2017]

TRAITS. The slender shark sucker is the most abundant remora species. Its lower jaws extend further than the upper jaw and it is usually a dark brownish-grey or simply dark grey in colour with a darker stripe along the sides. This stripe may be lined by a thin white line. The pectoral fin is generally located high up on the side of the body (Fig. 1). These fish are generally about 100cm in length with a slender body (McGroutner, 2016). Visually differentiating between male and female is difficult, and immature sharksuckers appear very similar to adults after development of their sucking disc (Kowerska, 2002). The oval shaped sucking disc is a highly modified dorsal fin (Fig. 2). This disc has approximately 22 laminae (plates) whose purpose is to allow the fish to attach to its host successfully.

DISTRIBUTION. The slender shark sucker is widely distributed throughout the oceans; the Pacific Ocean north to San Francisco, the Indian Ocean, and the western Atlantic Ocean (Fig. 3) (Bester, 2017).

HABITAT AND ACTIVITY. *Echeneis naucrates* can be typically found in warm tropical waters, leisurely swimming in schools inshore and amongst coral reefs. Generally, these fish are found in water depths ranging from 20-50m (Bester, 2017). Most times they are commensally attached to a host (rays, sharks, whales, etc.). These fish can be found in both marine and brackish waters.

FOOD AND FEEDING. The slender shark sucker has been observed to feed on remnants of its host's prey as well its parasites. This fish has also been noted to feed on small fish, crustaceans and even squid. They are also observed freely swimming in groups. The slender sharksucker has no known major predators or parasites. They do however, have a wide array of hosts to which they attach (Collette and Bishop, 2015).

BEHAVIOUR. Slender sharksuckers are often observed free-swimming in a school, which is uncommon in other remoras. When they are not leisurely swimming, they can be seen intimately attached to a host (sharks, dolphins, ships, rays, etc.) in a commensal relationship. Here, neither host nor the slender sharksucker is harmed, but the rather the latter gains benefits for food, protection and energy conservation. Additionally, as a result of their poor swimming abilities, this remora is highly dependent on its host for survival.

REPRODUCTION. Reproduction commonly occurs in the seasons of spring and summer but during the autumn months for those residing in the Mediterranean Sea. The slender sharksucker is dioecious (with separate males and females). On hatching, the baby fish are about 6mm in length and possess a partially developed anatomy. One of the initial features to develop is the vital sucking disc along with teeth; relatively large in the lower jaw and relatively small in the upper jaw (Kowerska, 2002). Baby *Echeneis naucrates* reside independently until their length is approximately 3cm, when they begin to attach themselves to hosts. Sexual maturation is attained between 3-5 years old.

APPLIED ECOLOGY. This slender sharksucker is not listed by the IUCN as being endangered as it maintains a stable population trend. In previous times, this remora was used as part of a technique by fishermen to catch large fish (Kowerska, 2002). The sharksucker would be caught and released back into the water with fishing lines attached to it. As the remora enters, it attached itself to a larger organism almost immediately. Thus, fishermen are allowed to catch the large fish.

REFERENCES

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- Collete, B.B., and Bishop, J. 2015. *Echeneis naucrates*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
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Fig. 2. Oval-shaped sucking disc of *Echeneis naucrates*.

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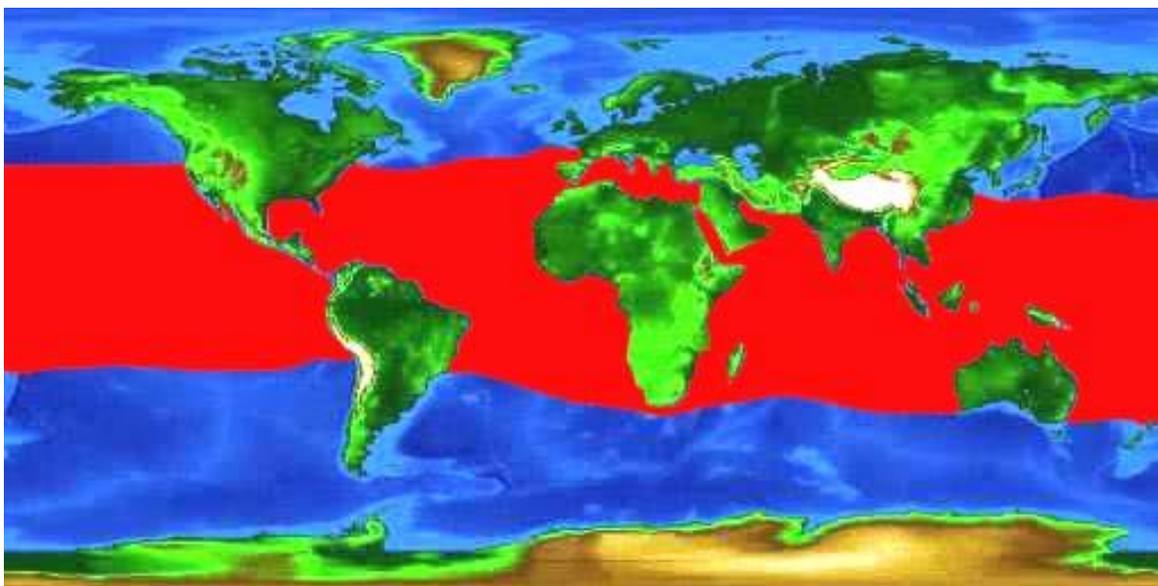


Fig. 3. Geographic distribution of the slender sharksucker.

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