Remora remora (Common Remora or Shark Sucker)

Family: Echeneidae (Remoras)
Order: Perciformes (Perch and Allied Fish)
Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)

Fig. 1. Shark sucker, *Remora remora.*

[http://www.realmonstrosities.com/2012/12/remora.html, downloaded 14 November 2016]

TRAITS. *Remora remora*, also known as the brown or shark sucker, is generally about 50cm in length, evenly black or brown in colour both on top and below (Marshall, 1965). It has a long flattened head which is estimated to be 26-29% of the body length, with a lower jaw that juts out and teeth that are sharp and recurved inwards. *Remora remora* has 21-27 dorsal fin rays and 25-32 pectoral fin rays, which are spineless (Unesco, 1989; Nelson, 1984). The most unique characteristic and the one to which *Remora remora* owes its common name is the sucking disc on the top of its head, which was formed from a dorsal fin with around 20 movable lamina, used for attachment to larger animals which provide transport and food (Nelson, 1984).

DISTRIBUTION. It can be found in all warm seas, such as the Indian Ocean, Atlantic Ocean Pacific Ocean, western Mediterranean, and the Caribbean (Unesco, 1989).

HABITAT AND ECOLOGY. *Remora remora* is a salt water fish and can thus be found in the oceans, especially the warmer parts, on sharks and other large fish (Fig. 2), sea turtles and sometimes ships (Marshall, 1965). It also be found freely swimming and consumes parasitic copepods (Cressey and Lachner, 1970). The parasitic copepods that constitute their diet could be correlated with the host fish from which the *Remora remora* was removed. It was initially thought that *Remora remora* detaches from its host and consumes the scraps left behind from the meals of the host (Herald, 1962). Newer research into the diet of this species has shown that both of these are ways in which the *Remora remora* feed as well as consuming planktonic organisms (Bohlke and Chaplin, 1993).

BEHAVIOUR. *Remora remora* typically inhabit warmer oceans where they can attach to sharks and other large fish, that they form a symbiotic relationship with (Unesco, 1989). It is not viewed as a parasite despite commonly being attached to a host as they inflict no harm, and the host benefits from this symbiotic relationship (Bohlke and Chaplin, 1993). They may move from host to host (Cressey and Lachner, 1970).

APPLIED BIOLOGY. *Remora remora* is used as a food source in countries like Ghana and Senegal where it is sold dried-salted and/or smoked (Curtis et al., 2016). They are more commonly used as a hunting fish where a line is attached to their tail and they are released into the sea; when they attach themselves to a host the fisherman pulls the *Remora remora* back in with the host attached (McClane, 1998).

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Fig. 2. Shark suckers on a manta ray.

[http://www.discoverlife.org/mp/20q?search=Remora+remora&l=Spanish, downloaded 14 November 2016]