

## *Tylosurus crocodilus* (Stickfish or Houndfish)

Family: Belonidae (Needlefish)

Order: Beloniformes (Flyingfish and Needlefish)

Class: Actinopterygii (Ray-finned Fish)



**Fig. 1.** Stickfish, *Tylosurus crocodilus*.

[<http://www.animalspot.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Houndfish-Photos.jpg>, downloaded 10 October 2016]

**TRAITS.** The stickfish has a long, thin body and very narrow jaws (Fig. 1). Males may reach as long as 150cm and as heavy as 6.4kg. Their colours are silver on the sides with different shades of blue to green on the back. Stickfish have very sharp teeth (Fig. 2) and a caudal fin that is deeply forked (Fig. 3) (Paugy et al., 2003). A nasal pit is also present, in front of the eyes (Randall et al., 1990). Stickfish or houndfish are also known by several local names in different regions, such as hound needlefish, alligator gar, giant longtom, crocodile longtom, seagar, and ocean piper.

**DISTRIBUTION.** The houndfish is present in oceans worldwide. In the western Atlantic they can be found from the USA all the way to Brazil; they are also found in the tropical waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

**HABITAT AND ECOLOGY.** Found in oceanic habitats that are tropical and subtropical, in reefs and even lagoons. They prefer warmer temperatures about 20-30°C. Although they usually stay

immediately beneath the surface of the ocean, swimming or hovering, they may occur at depths over 15m. Their most common depth is between 0-13m (Breder and Rosen, 1966).

**REPRODUCTION.** Their mode of reproduction is by external fertilization. Their eggs are connected to objects present in the water, by tendrils on the surface of the eggs. A female stickfish may produce 30,000 eggs (Cole, 2010).

**BEHAVIOUR.** Hound fish have been observed in small schools and may also be solitary. They are capable of jumping and they favour doing so from the dark into the light. Because of this jumping they may be viewed as a danger as they can jump very fast and moderately high. In 2000 a hound fish was recorded to have leaped out of the water, stabbing a teenager in the neck. There are several other cases of houndfish stabbing humans (Danielson, 2000). Houndfish are capable of puncturing their predators using their sharp snouts. Their major predator is tunas and other large fish. They jump when they are startled or attacked (Danielson, 2000).

**APPLIED BIOLOGY.** Stickfish consume anchovies as well as small flying fish that are capable of fitting into their mouths (Randall et al., 1990). They are not viewed as threats despite their ability to stab human beings. Although they are safe to eat, many people do not indulge because their bones are blue. They are however sold as fish food but besides this use, they are known as fish that are to be caught and released. They are therefore not endangered and may also be used in large commercial aquariums (IUCN, 2015).

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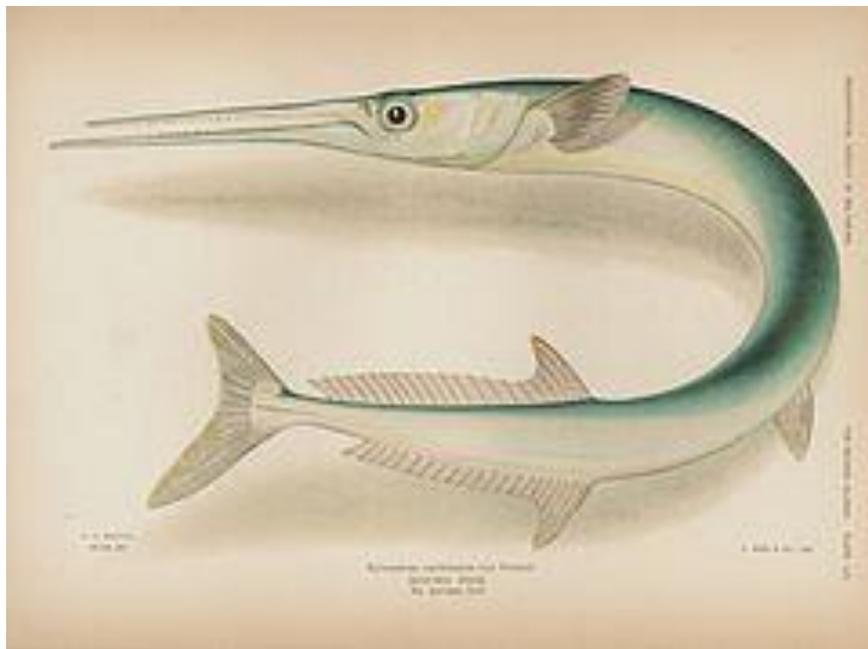
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**Fig. 2.** Display of sharp teeth on thin beak-like mouth of the houndfish.

[<https://cudamanadventures.com/tag/pier-fishing/>, downloaded 10 October 2016]



**Fig. 3.** Structure of the houndfish.

[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tylosurus\\_crocodilus.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Tylosurus_crocodilus.jpg)downloaded 21 September 2016]

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