



MLA-012-Rare Seahorse-UK

How do we save coral reefs?

Vic Ferguson

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation 281.886.7428 P.O. Box 311117 Houston Texas 77231

6.30.13

Rare seahorse habitat wiped out by boat anchors

Britain's largest colony of precious seahorses has been wiped out after their habitat was destroyed by boat anchors.



A Spiny seahorse in Studland Bay Photo: Steve Trehella / www.ukcoastalwildlife.co.uk

By **Daniel Johnson**, and agencies

2:28PM BST 16 Jul 2013

 [8 Comments](#)

Studland Bay in Dorset is the only place in the country that is home to both species of native seahorses, the spiny and short-snouted varieties, due to its warm waters.

The eel-grass beds in shallow water – which provides an ideal breeding ground for the endangered species - has been churned up by the large numbers of pleasure boats that weigh anchor off-shore. As many as 173 boats were in the bay last Saturday, according to Neil Garrick-Maidment, director of the Seahorse Trust, who blamed “show off” owners who want to get their boats close to the beach.



MLA-012-Rare Seahorse-UK

How do we save coral reefs?

Vic Ferguson

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation 281.886.7428 P.O. Box 311117 Houston Texas 77231

Conservationists have unsuccessfully campaigned to have Studland Bay listed as a Marine Protected Zone, with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs due to review the application next year.

But campaigners warn it will “already be too late”, with nothing to stop the “absolutely disastrous” decline in numbers.

Related Articles

- [Rare baby seahorse spotted](#)

03 Sep 2010

- [Anchor-free zone to protect seahorses](#)

19 Jul 2009

- [Seahorses' short syndrome](#)

07 Aug 2009

- [Sailors vs seahorses: the battle of Studland Bay](#)

11 Jul 2011

Marine experts recorded 40 individual spiny seahorses at Studland and one pair of the short-snouted species five years ago, with only five spotted 12 months ago and none at all this year.

Mr Garrick-Maidment said: “The colony at Studland was by far the largest known around the UK and one of the most important in Europe.

“We started recording them in 2008 but prior to that there has always been anecdotal evidence of them always being there.

“But their eel-grass habitat has been steadily fragmented by boat anchors and heavy mooring chains that have uprooted the meadows.

“We have had experienced divers spend many hours looking for them this year and they literally haven't found any of them. They have disappeared and this is absolutely disastrous.”

The Seahorse Trust, which is backed by the network of SeaLife Centres, has campaigned to have the sheltered bay protected.



MLA-012-Rare Seahorse-UK

How do we save coral reefs?

Vic Ferguson

The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation 281.886.7428 P.O. Box 311117 Houston Texas 77231

The status would mean that mooring buoys would have been placed in the bay for boats to use rather than them dropping anchor at any given location.

Mr Garrick-Maidment added: "There is a possibility Studland will receive approval some time next year but it may already be too late.

"Why must we always go up to the wire before action is taken.

"If Studland Bay was on land and seahorses were great crested newts there would be hell to pay if nothing was done. A single newt has stopped housing developments before.

"There is no doubt in my mind that the reason is the disintegration of the eel-grass beds caused by the chains and anchors of illegally-moored boats."

He also accused Crown Estates, who own the affected land, of "turning a blind eye".

Chris Brown, a marine biologist at the SeaLife centre, said it was "vitally important" the area was given protected status.

The spiny seahorse - hippocampus histrix in Latin - arrives in Studland to breed in May and disappear in the autumn.

*Vic Ferguson
The World Federation for Coral Reef Conservation
Executive Director
P.O. Box 311117
Houston, Texas 77231
vic.ferguson@wfcrc.org
www.wfcrc.org
281.886.7428 (office)
281.309.1201 (cell)*