

GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET

Spotted garden eel

Heteroconger hassi

Range/Habitat

- The garden eel is found in tropical Indo-Pacific waters from the Red Sea and East Africa to Japan and south to northwest Australia (the Great Barrier Reef) and New Caldonia.
- It lives along sandy slopes and bottom depths of 23 - 164 feet (7 - 50 m) in strong currents.

Physical Characteristics

- The garden eel has a whitish body densely covered with small black speckles and three larger black spots located at the gill opening, the pectoral (back) fin on the side of the body and one around the anus.
- It can grow to be 24 inches (60 cm) in length, though lengths of 14-16 inches (35-40 cm) are more common.
- Its body diameter is about a half inch (14 mm).
- The juvenile is entirely black.

Diet/Feeding

- The spotted garden eel feeds on zooplankton picked from the current flowing past them.

Conservation Status

- The spotted garden eel is not in IUCN Red List.

Additional Information

- The garden eel lives in a sandy burrow it digs tail-first. It then coats it with its body mucus so that it cements the walls of the burrow, preventing it from collapse or sand cave-ins.
- It is easily disturbed and quickly moves backward into its burrow by diving tail first.
- The garden eel lives in colonies of up to several hundred individuals, each living in its own burrow, approximately 15 organisms per square meter. Usually the largest male lives in the center burrow.
- It is most commonly seen with half of its body extended out of the burrow swaying in the current like a garden of seagrass, hence their namesake, in order to feed on passing plankton.
- The garden eel has such a connection with its sand burrow home that it even stays within the burrow when spawning. Mates will stretch from one burrow hole to an adjacent burrow and intertwine their bodies to mate.
- The spotted garden eel was discovered when SCUBA diving became popular. Now divers locate many colonies in their range.

Sources

www.Fishbase.org

Encyclopedia of Fishes, 2nd Edition. pg 88

<http://www.amonline.net.au/fishes/fishfacts/fish/hhassi.htm>

ReefFishes, Tropical Pacific. Allen, Gerald; Steene, Roger; Humann, Paul; Deloach, Ned., 20038, pg 447