

Education Department
Waikīkī Aquarium
University of Hawai‘i-Mānoa

MARINE LIFE PROFILE: DRAGON MORAY EEL

Hawaiian name: pūhi-kauila
Scientific name: *Enchelycore pardalis*
Distribution: Indo-Pacific, from Red Sea
& East Africa to Hawai‘i
Size: to 3 feet (0.9 m)
Diet: reef fishes



The dragon moray eel (*Enchelycore pardalis*) is among the most striking moray eels. Its orange-brown body is dramatically patterned with spots and streaks of black and white. The curved jaws cannot completely close and are filled with fang-like canine teeth. The pointed snout bears long nostril tubes. Another set of nostril tubes just in front of the eyes look like horns. These tubular nostrils are assumed to aid in pinpointing odor sources as the eel hunts over the reef for prey. While relatively rare in Hawai‘i, this species is found throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Moray eels are important predators on Hawaiian reefs and there are close to 40 species reported. Their streamlined bodies are adapted for hunting within crevices in the reef framework; they lack pectoral fins and scales. Morays of the genera *Enchelycore* and *Gymnothorax* have large, powerful jaws and sharp, fang-like teeth for grasping and holding prey like fishes and octopus. In addition to the teeth of the upper and lower jaws, some morays also have teeth in the roof of the mouth to assure capture of their prey.

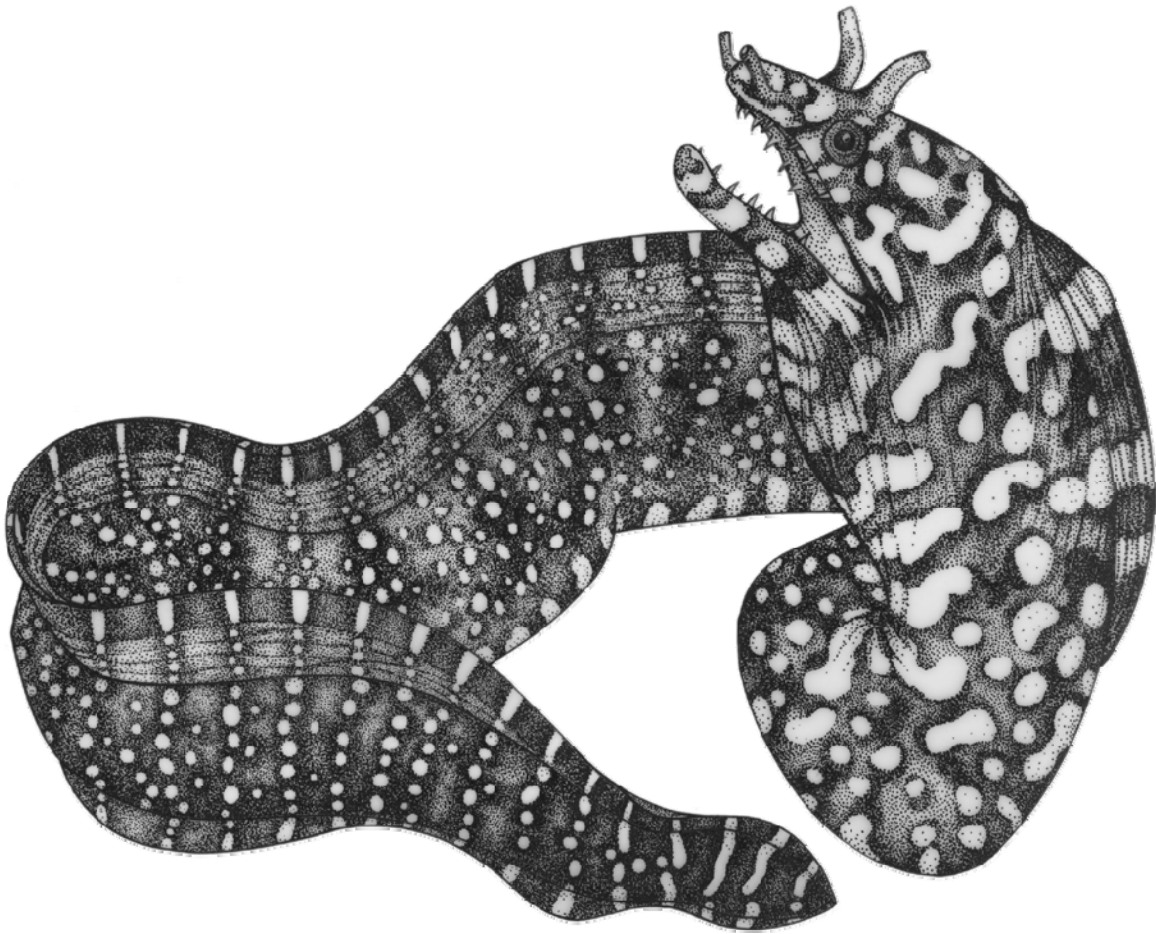
Despite their fierce appearance, most eels are not highly aggressive but they will defend their shelter. When exploring the reef, never reach into crevices and holes. Bites from the backward-curving teeth of morays cause ragged wounds and are prone to infection from the bacteria in the eel's mouth.

More common than the dragon moray are: the undulated moray (*Gymnothorax undulatus*), which is brown with a yellowish head; and larger, yellow margin moray (*Gymnothorax flavimarginatus*), which can be recognized by its size and the yellow border around its tail.

Classification:

Kingdom Animalia
Phylum Chordata
Class Osteichthyes
Order Anguilliformes
Family Muraenidae
Genus Enchelycore
Species pardalis

DRAGON MORAY EEL
pūhi-kauila
Enchelycore pardalis



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