

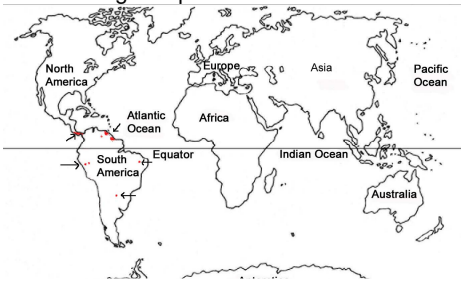
Hypostomus Plecostomus



Photo courtesy of Janet Wisneski

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Actinopterygii
Order: Siluriformes
Family: Loricariidae
Genus: *Hypostomus*
Species: *plecostomus*

Native Range Map



Habitat

- **In the Wild:** This species occurs naturally in fresh and brackish waters of river mouths on the Pacific Ocean slope of Costa Rica and both Atlantic and Pacific slopes of Panama, southward to Uruguay. It can also be found in Florida and Texas due to releases by recreational aquarists.
- **Exhibit Location:** Aquarium in Zoo Administration Office

Characteristics

- This species can grow up to 18 inches in an aquarium and up to 24 inches in the wild.
- *Hypostomus plecostomus* have 7 dorsal fin rays and an elongated, dark brown body with a large head. It is covered everywhere but the belly with large, bony plates.
- The eyes are small and set high on the head.
- Its mouth, located on the underside of the head, has suction-cup-like lips that suck algae by adhering to smooth surfaces. *Plecostomus* means 'folded mouth.'
- There is no visible difference between males and females.
- **Lifespan: In the Wild** Over 15 years; **In Captivity** 10-15 years

Behaviors

- In an aquarium, this species requires a large, well-planted tank with numerous sizable shelters. Water chemistry is not critical, but its quality must be good with a temperature range of 72-82 ° F.
- *Hypostomus plecostomus* is a peaceful fish that can be kept in a community tank, but it does not get along with its own species and can become aggressively territorial.
- It is most active at dusk and during the night and likes to rest on driftwood pieces or in caves when not eating algae.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** None

Reproduction

- In the wild, the species breeds in deep burrows excavated in riverbanks, but reproduction is unsuccessful in an aquarium.
- *Hypostomus plecostomus* are bred for aquariums in large commercial fishery ponds in Singapore, Florida and Hong Kong. A pair will dig a burrow into the muddy steep side of the pond and will spawn about 300 eggs. The male guards the eggs and the fry feed off the body mucus secreted by the parents. The ponds are then drained, and the parents and their young are removed.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** herbivorous
- **At the Zoo:** tank algae, vegetable flakes/pellets/tablets

Conservation Status

- **IUCN status:** not listed; **CITES Appendix:** not listed
- They are commonly found in the wild and are not threatened.
- Their numbers are increasing in the Gulf of Mexico due to being dumped by aquarists.

- Predators: none known

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- There are over 120 *hypostomus plecostomus* species.
- This species can pinch and make holes in plastic bags with its pointed teeth.
- The *hypostomus plecostomus* can store air in its intestine allowing it to survive in poor conditions.
- It is sometimes called an algae eater, suckerfish or suckermouth catfish.
- Often referred to as “pleco” because of the superstition that if spelled out fully, the fish will die.

Sources:

- Buruchowitz, D (2001). *The simple guide to freshwater aquariums*. Neptune City, NJ: T.F.H. Publications, Inc.
- Butler, R (2006). Plecostomus, suckermouth catfish, pleco. Retrieved February 9, 2007, from Mongabay.com Web site: http://fish.mongabay.com/species/Hypostomus_plecostomus.html
- Dawes, J (2001). *Complete encyclopedia of the freshwater aquarium*. Buffalo, NY: Firefly Books, Inc.
- Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, (2005, August 3). *Hypostomus plecostomus* (Linnaeus, 1758). Retrieved February 9, 2007, from Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Web site: http://nis.gsmfc.org/nis_factsheet.php?toc_id=191
- McEwan, M Herbivorous vacuum: *Hypostomus plecostomus* is famous for its ability to keep the aquarium sparkling clean. Retrieved February 9, 2007, from Aquaria Central Web site: <http://www.aquariacentral.com/fishinfo/fresh/pleco.shtml>
- Scheurmann, I (1986). *The new aquarium handbook*. Happaage, NY: Barron's Education Series, Inc.