

**WEIRD
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Seahorses

Sierra Wilson



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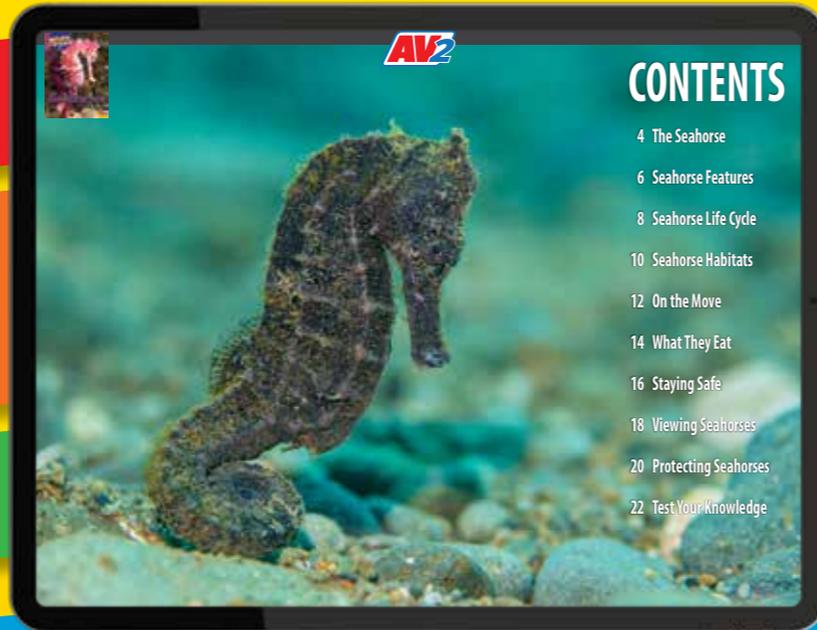
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Seahorses

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The Seahorse

Have you ever seen an animal under the water that looks like a horse? It may have been a seahorse. Although they may look like tiny horses, seahorses are actually a type of fish. They are easily recognized because of their horse-like head and curved tail. Seahorses are related to pipefish and sea dragons and often share **habitats** with them.

There are about
50 different
kinds of seahorses.



Common Seahorse

Scientific Name *Hippocampus kuda*

Diet Carnivore

Length 5 inches (12.7 centimeters)

Habitat Tropical coasts, coral reefs

Seahorse Features

A seahorse's body has many different **adaptations**. Some of these help the fish find food or stay safe. Others help it to survive in its habitat.

Ridges

Seahorses are covered in rings of bony plates that act like armor. These ridges help protect them from **predators**.

Skin

Seahorses can change their skin color. They do this for **camouflage** and to communicate with other seahorses.

Tail

Seahorses use their flexible tails like an anchor to keep them in place. They wrap their tails around seaweed, coral, or other objects.

Snout

Seahorses have a long, trumpet-shaped snout. It helps them suck up food, such as small **crustaceans**.

Seahorse Life Cycle

Unlike most fish, seahorses have only one **mate** and stay with that partner for life. They perform twisting, twirling dances to **court** and greet their mate. Then, the female seahorse lays her eggs into a pouch on the male's body. After a few weeks, baby seahorses, or fry, leave their father's pouch. The seahorse fry are tiny, but they can already care for themselves.

A male seahorse may carry between 5 and 1,000 young in his pouch.



Seahorse and Sea Dragon Length Comparison



Seahorse Habitats

Seahorses are found in many habitats around the world. They live in shallow, coastal waters in places such as coral reefs, seagrass beds, **mangroves**, and **estuaries**. Seahorses thrive in both warm and cool waters.

Seahorses prefer calm water. They quickly become exhausted if they must swim in stormy seas.

Seahorse Facts



Seahorses can be found in the coastal waters of every continent except Antarctica.

On the Move

Seahorses are among the slowest fish in the world. They use a small **fin** on their back to swim forward. The slowest seahorses only move about 5 feet (1.5 meters) per hour. Sometimes, seahorses hold on to floating sea plants in order to travel to a new location.

Seahorses use two tiny fins on the sides of their head to turn.

Seahorse Facts

A seahorse's back fin flutters up to 35 times per second.

What They Eat

Even though seahorses are slow swimmers, they are fast hunters. They can catch prey in just 1 millisecond. Seahorses ambush their prey. They wait in calm waters. When food drifts near, seahorses quickly suck it into their long snout before it has time to flee.

Seahorses do not have any teeth. They swallow their meals whole.



Seahorses eat small fish and tiny crustaceans, such as brine shrimp.

Seahorse Facts

One seahorse can eat more than 3,000 brine shrimp each day.

Staying Safe

Seahorse predators include crabs and larger fish. Seahorses are too slow to escape danger. However, they are difficult to spot. Their body shape and coloring help them blend into their surroundings. Their hard, bony bodies also make them difficult for other creatures to eat.

Swimming upright helps seahorses blend in with plants such as seagrass.

Viewing Seahorses

Seahorses are popular fish. Some people view seahorses in their natural environment by scuba diving or snorkeling. Other people visit and learn about seahorses in **aquariums**.

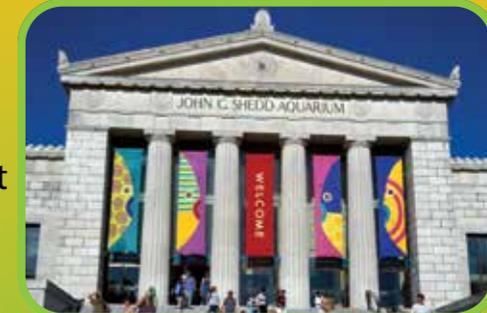


World Map



1 Chicago, Illinois

Visitors to Chicago's Shedd Aquarium can see and learn about several **species** of seahorse. Lucky visitors might even see seahorse fry that have been born at the aquarium.



2 Sulawesi, Indonesia

Off the coast of Sulawesi, visitors can go on guided underwater dive tours to see several seahorse species, including at least three species of pygmy seahorse, in their natural habitat.



3 Cozumel, Mexico

The island of Cozumel is well-known for its rich coral reefs. They are protected by law. **Tourists** can view seahorses and many other sea creatures by snorkeling or taking guided scuba diving tours.



Protecting Seahorses

Seahorses face many threats today. Humans collect them for use in traditional medicine and personal aquariums. Millions of seahorses are accidentally caught in fishing nets. **Pollutants**, climate change, and habitat destruction cause additional harm. Several species of seahorse are **endangered**. Others are vulnerable, which means they may become endangered soon.

Threatened seahorse species include the Cape seahorse, the West African seahorse, and the tiger tail seahorse.

Common Seahorse Conservation Status

LC	NT	VU	EN	CR	EW	EX
Least Concern	Near Threatened	Vulnerable	Endangered	Critically Endangered	Extinct in the Wild	Extinct



Test Your Knowledge

1 How many kinds of seahorse are there?

2 How can seahorses communicate with each other?

3 Where do female seahorses lay their eggs?

4 How long is a lined seahorse?

5 Near which continents do seahorses live?

6 What do seahorses use to swim forward?

7 How quickly can seahorses catch their prey?

8 Why do some humans collect seahorses?

ANSWERS
 1. About 50. 2. By changing the color of their skin. 3. In a pouch on the male. 4. 7.5 inches (19 cm). 5. All but Antarctica. 6. A small fin on their back. 7. In 1 millisecond. 8. For traditional medicine and personal aquariums.

Key Words

adaptations: changes in animals that make them better able to survive in their homes

aquariums: places that keep and display animals that live in water

camouflage: to blend in with one's surroundings

court: to attract a mate

crustaceans: a group of aquatic animals including crabs, shrimp, and lobsters

endangered: close to disappearing from Earth

estuaries: areas of water where fresh and salt water mix

fin: a part of an animal's body that is used to help it move and steer in the water

habitats: the places where plants or animals live

mate: a member of a pair of animals that can reproduce or have children

mangroves: types of trees that are able to grow in places that flood during high tides

pollutants: harmful substances such as chemicals or waste

predators: animals that hunt other animals

prey: animals that are hunted by other animals

species: groups of closely related animals or plants

tourists: people who visit other locations or countries for pleasure

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