

# Weedy Seadragon

In the genus *Phyllopteryx* all by itself, the weedy seadragons is a close relative to the seahorse. They are also closely related to leafy seadragons. Both species look like they have leaves growing on them. These are not fins; they are only for **camouflage**, the ability to blend in with one's environment. The weedy seadragon has dorsal (back) and neck fins that it uses to swim. Like seahorses, they

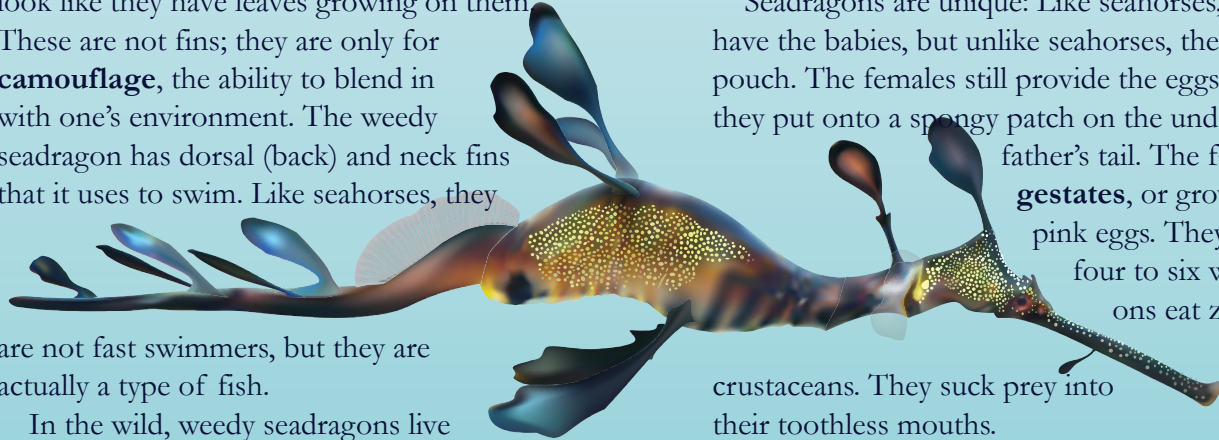
are not fast swimmers, but they are actually a type of fish.

In the wild, weedy seadragons live exclusively around Australia in the Indian Ocean. Because of this, it is the marine emblem of the State of Victoria in Australia. When they are full grown, weedy seadragons are a rusty red color with yellow and purple markings. Like their cousin, the seahorse, weedy and leafy seadragons have long, thin snouts that make their heads look like a horse. Their bodies are made up of bony rings and they have thin tails. Unlike seahorses, weedy seadragons don't have **prehensile** tails that can grip things. Instead, they drift and go with the flow of

the sea current, looking like a loose piece of seaweed. Leafy seadragons can be up to 14 inches long, while weedy seadragons can be up to 18 inches long.

Seadragons are unique: Like seahorses, the males have the babies, but unlike seahorses, they have no pouch. The females still provide the eggs, which they put onto a spongy patch on the underside of the father's tail. The father then **gestates**, or grows, the bright pink eggs. They hatch after four to six weeks. Seadragons eat zooplankton and tiny crustaceans. They suck prey into their toothless mouths.

Seadragons are classified as "near threatened" on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's red list. They were taken for pets too often and are now under the Australian government's protection as well. It is difficult to breed weedy seadragons in captivity, but many aquariums are trying. The Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California, the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the Melbourne Aquarium in Melbourne, Australia, are a few that have been successful.



1. **New terms:** See how these three terms are used in the text, and write a definition next to each one.

**camouflage** the ability to blend in with one's environment

**prehensile** can grip things

**gestate** to grow babies in a womb

2. What do seadragons use their leafy looking appendages for? camouflage

3. The male seadragons, like seahorses, gestate the babies. **True** or False?

4. Seadragons are like mythical dragons: They have big, sharp teeth. **True** or **False**?