

# Seahorse Facts

There are 47 species of seahorses. They are in the genus (group of species) Hippocampus, which means "horse sea monster" in Ancient Greek. Seahorses live in shallow tropical warm waters all over the world. They like to hide, so they live in seagrass beds, estuaries and coral reefs.

Only four species live in the Pacific Ocean of North and South America. The dwarf seahorse lives in the Bahamas. Three kinds live in the Mediterranean Sea: the long-snouted seahorse, the short-snouted seahorse and the sea pony.

Seahorses range in size from a half-inch to 14 inches. They are named seahorses because they look like horses. They are bony fish. Instead of scales, they have thin skin stretched over bony rings all over their bodies. Each species has its own number of rings. Seahorses swim upright. They have a flexible neck unlike most fish. Each seahorse has a unique coronet (spikes) on their head.

According to Guinness World Records 2009, the dwarf seahorse is the slowest-moving fish, with a top speed of about 5 feet (150 cm) per hour. They are not good swimmers. They only flutter a dorsal fin and use pectoral fins (behind their eyes) to steer. They have no caudal (tail) fin. They have a tail instead that can grab onto things. They are usually seen hanging onto plants or seaweed with their tails, floating with the ocean waves. They have long snouts that they use to suck up food and eyes that can each move in different directions at once.

The male seahorse has the babies. The female puts her eggs into the male's pouch, up to 1,500 at a time. The male carries the eggs for nine to 45 days until the baby seahorses emerge already hatched but very small. When "dating," seahorses dance with each other, change color and hold tails. Seahorses eat small crustaceans floating in the water or crawling on the bottom of the ocean. Seahorses use camouflage both for protection and to hide while waiting for food to swim by. Mysid shrimp are their favorite diet. Seahorses are endangered because of overfishing and habitat destruction. They are also used in Chinese medicine. Seahorses need to be protected so they do not become extinct!

## What did you learn about seahorses?

1. What does the group name Hippocampus mean? "horse sea monster"
2. How many species of seahorses are there? 47
3. How fast can a seahorse swim? 5 feet (150 cm) per hour
4. Which has the babies, the male or female seahorses? the male
5. Why are seahorses endangered? overfishing, habitat destruction and Chinese medicine uses

