

Lined Seahorse

Hippocampus erectus



Image Courtesy of SC Aquarium (M. Ward)

- Relatives:** Class: Actinopterygii – ray-finned fishes
- Order: Gasterosteiformes – pipefishes and sticklebacks
- Family: Syngnathidae – includes seahorses, sea dragons and pipefish
- Description:** The seahorse is a horse-looking fish with a prehensile tail and elongated snout. They do not have a caudal (tail fin). The lined seahorse has pale dark lines along the body. Their scales are like armor plates.
- Size:** Adults can reach lengths of 6in (15cm).
- Habitat:** The seahorse is usually found coiling around branches of soft corals, sea grasses or most anything else they can wrap their tail around. They may also be found in sargassum.
- Range:** They are found along the east coast of North America from Nova Scotia south to northern Gulf of Mexico and Argentina.
- Predators:** Crabs, larger fish, and sea turtles will prey on adults and juveniles.
- Diet/Prey:** The lined seahorse will feed on small crustaceans, plankton, worms and other invertebrates.
- Aquarium Diet:** Brine shrimp and mysis (small freshwater shrimp).
- Reproduction:** Mating usually occurs during a full moon. Courtship rituals, including changing color and numerous “dances” with their mate, are preformed for a few days, sometimes for 9 hours or more at a time. Male and female will mate for life. The female will deposit 100 or

more eggs into the male's brood pouch (a hollow section of the male's abdomen). The male then releases sperm into the pouch to fertilize the eggs; the pouch will then seal shut after mating. The embryos develop in the pouch and are nourished by individual yolk sacs. The male gives "birth" to miniature seahorses that may be as small as .4in (1cm). Males do not care for young after they are born.

Fun Facts:

- Lifespan is approximately 4 years.
- Scientific name *Hippocampus* is Greek for "bent horse" or "horse sea animal."
- Have no teeth in their mouth.
- Lack stomachs so they must eat a lot to make up for their inefficient digestive systems.
- Can move their eyes independently, which allows them to look for food with one eye and predators with the other.
- Their dorsal fin can beat 20-30 times a second when swimming.

Conservation Connection:

Countries in the East (mainly China) use seahorses for medicinal purposes as well as food and aphrodisiacs. Medicinal purposes they might be used for are asthma, arteriosclerosis, incontinence and impotence, skin ailments, heart disease and thyroid problems. The country of China alone consumes about 6 million seahorses annually. In some places dried seahorses are worth about \$550 US dollars per pound.

Seahorses are facing problems due to the destruction of their habitats, pollution and bycatch from shrimp trawls.

Although the lined seahorse is not considered federally or internationally 'Threatened' or 'Endangered' as this time, they are protected under Appendix II of CITES because of the high and increasing commercial trade of this species that was unregulated and not managed under regional fisheries organizations.

Status in SC:

Not listed as endangered or threatened

Aliases:

Banded seahorse, northern seahorse.

References:

Robins, C. Richard and G. Carleton Ray. A Field Guide to Atlantic Coast Fishes, North America. Houghton Mifflin Company. Boston, 1986.

Florida Museum of Natural History. "CITES Lists Basking Sharks, Whale Sharks, and Seahorses in Appendix II." Nov. 18, 2002.

<http://www.flmnh.ufl.edu/fish/innews/citessharkseahorse.html>