

# Fact Sheet

## LARGE-BELLIED SEAHORSE

### *Hippocampus abdominalis*



All Seahorses belong to the family Syngnathidae (pronounced sing-nath-i-day) which also includes pipefishes, pipehorses and sea dragons and they belong to the genus Hippocampus, from the Greek words for horse (hippos) and sea monster (campus).

The Large-Bellied Seahorse (*Hippocampus abdominalis*) is the only seahorse found around the New Zealand coastline, of the 35 species known worldwide. This intriguing, bony fish is the largest seahorse, growing up to 35 cm in length and has some incredible adaptations that make it truly unique!

Living at a depth of around 100 metres, it grasps onto seaweed with its prehensile tail. Because it can change colour to blend in with its environment, the seahorse can cleverly avoid detection by its predators. At the same time, it can 'ambush' its unsuspecting prey, which mainly consists of small marine crustaceans such as shrimps. Seahorses have no teeth and swallow their food whole, by sucking it up through their snout!

Seahorses swim in an upright position, although their body shape makes them rather poor swimmers. Their body is covered in bony plates, with leathery, scaleless skin and they propel themselves through the water by using a small fin on their back that flutters up to 35 times per second!

These delightfully unusual creatures also perform a "dance", in which several of them twine their tails together and wave through the water. Once the seahorses have selected a mate, which they keep for the entire breeding season, they meet every day and do a dance to reinforce their connection.

### Activity ideas

- **EDUCATE OTHERS**

Share your knowledge about seahorses with others, capturing their attention with an eye-catching, interactive display at the beach or even your local aquarium!

Key messages could include: the threats to seahorses and how people can help to protect them, why conservation of seahorses is so important and interesting factual information. You could even have your Coastline Clean-up Challenge rubbish as part of your display!

- **COASTLINE CLEAN-UP CHALLENGE**

Visit areas of coastline with your classmates, friends, family or environmental group and see how humans are impacting on the area.

Take on the challenge of clearing the area of litter. How are your actions helping wildlife in and around the sea?

- **QUIZ YOURSELF!**

Complete the 'Father Knows Best' seahorse quiz by going to: [www.sfscience.com/english/grade\\_3/unit\\_A/chap\\_2](http://www.sfscience.com/english/grade_3/unit_A/chap_2)

- **WRITE**

A new quiz to test the knowledge of your classmates and friends about seahorses!



With the head of the seahorse having a resemblance to that of a horse, can you see where they get their name from!

# Fact Sheet

## Large-Bellied Seahorse

Another amazing adaptation is that it is the male seahorse that becomes pregnant, when a female deposits her eggs into his pouch. He gives birth 40-50 days later, delivering up to 500 seahorse babies called 'fry'!



*This photograph shows three Large-Bellied Seahorses. Note their impressive, 'puffed out' tummies, presented specifically to attract the female (top, centre)!*

Seahorses are under threat from pollution of their natural habitats and from being exploited by those in commercial and tourism industries, who hunt them for use in traditional medicines and souvenirs. With a lifespan of just 5-10 years, measures have now been taken to ensure their survival in the future. All seahorses are now listed on Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species in Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), recognising they are an animal needing protection.

### What can you do to help protect seahorses?

#### On the water:

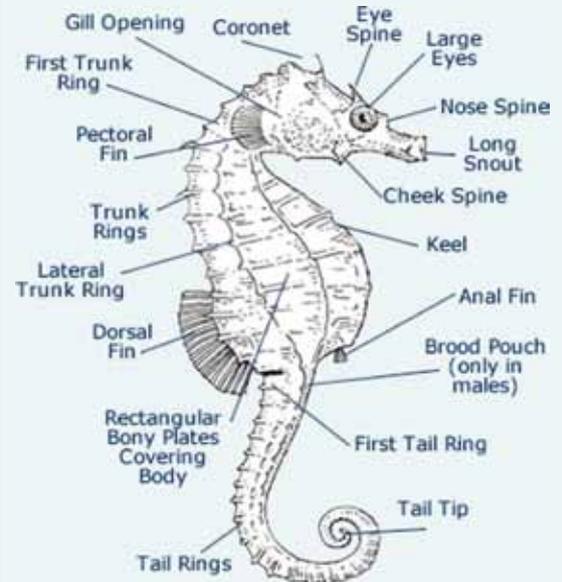
- Help keep the natural habitat of the seahorse free of litter and pollution. Always take your rubbish home with you. Maintain your boat well to avoid fuel spills and do not disturb plants such as seaweed – these are home to the seahorse.
- Never remove a seahorse from its natural habitat – this is where it will live most happily!
- Be respectful of the sea and all the amazing animals living in and around it.

#### Off the water:

- View seahorses at professionally managed aquariums, where experienced, knowledgeable aquarists provide optimum living conditions for seahorses.
- Don't buy seahorses for your home aquarium. It is very difficult to provide seahorses with the fresh, live food and environmental conditions they require to survive.
- Do not buy souvenir items produced for the tourist market, such as seahorse key chains. Remember – seahorses have been caught and killed to make such items!

## SEAHORSES

### SEAHORSE ANATOMY



### Taonga of Aotearoa - Manaia

Seahorses have a special place in New Zealand Maori culture. Manaia (spiritual guardians) are a Maori carving motif, often incorporating the seahorse and traditionally depicted in bone or greenstone (pounamu).

