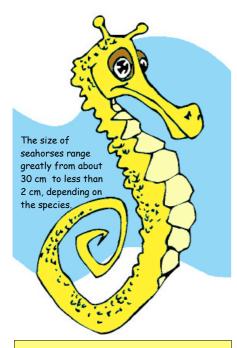
## Aquatic Life



# Seahorses

ceahorses are fish that have existed on the planet for over 40 million years. They live in water, breathe through gills and have a swim bladder. Seahorses are like a mixture of animals, having the head of a horse, the pouch of a kangaroo, the tail of a monkey and the colour changing ability of a chameleon.

Seahorses have excellent eyesight and their eyes are able to work independently on either side of



Some smaller seahorse species can live for only one year but most species live for on average 6 years.

their head. This means they can look forward and backwards at the same time, which is particularly helpful when hunting food and avoiding predators.

Seahorses will ingest anything small enough to fit into their mouths (mostly small crustaceans, but also fish fry and other small invertebrates). They have no stomach or teeth. Instead, they suck their prey in through a tubular snout at such speeds that the food instantly disintegrates.

Seahorses have few predators due to excellent camouflage, a sedentary lifestyle, and unappetising bony plates and spines. They have been found in the stomachs of large fishes, as well as penguins and other water birds. Crabs may be among the most threatening seahorse predators; damaged tails indicate a narrow escape. Unfortunately for most seahorse populations, man is their biggest predator!

### Where they live & how many are there?

Seahorses are found in almost every sea and ocean in the world from as far north as Ireland to as far south as Tasmania, Seahorses tend to like sea grass beds and areas where they can hang on in the current, in fact a seahorse may hang to the same piece of seaweed for it's entire life. There are between 30 and 40 species worldwide with most being found in the Indo-Pacific region. New species continue to be found nearly every year.

Poor Swimmers

Seahorses are poor swimmers. They swim by beating their dorsal fin along their back between 30-70 times per second. Pectoral fins which appear as ears either side of the head are used to help the seahorse with stability and steering.



This information is provided by Seahorse Aquariums in Dublin, the largest aquatic specialist shop in Ireland. Run by marine biologist Kealan Doyle and his team, it not only sells seashores but also offers a huge selection of fish and aquarium supplies. To read more about Kealan Doyle's work see page 7. You can also visit

www.seahorseaquariums.com

### It must be love!

Seahorses pair for life. They perform an elaborate courtship dance every morning of their lives. The seahorse is the only animal in the world where the male gives birth. The female transfers her eggs into the males pouch which he then releases sperm to fertilise the eggs. Pregnancy varies from 14 days to 4 weeks. The number of juveniles born ranges from 50 to 1500 depending on the species. Less than one in a thousand will survive to adulthood in the wild. For more details about their lovelife, read Captain Cockle's Log on page 15.

© 2012 Sherkin Island Marine Station & its licensors. All rights reserved.