

Seahorses in the Philippines

Why care about seahorses?

We love seahorses because they are small but mighty. These weird, wacky, charming fish with their unique shape and unusual behavior such as couples holding tails or males giving birth, appeal to people's hearts. We truly believe if we save seahorses we can save the seas. We share with you some of our favourite facts in hopes that you too will be charmed to take action for these unusual fish.

Seahorse biology: weird & wonderful

- 44 different known [species](#) (to date)
- Unusual shape: - snout like a horse, tail like a monkey & males have pouches like kangaroos
- Males become pregnant
- Seahorse couples 'greet' each other every day & hold tails
- All of these unusual traits help us to expand our understanding of reproductive ecology

Seahorse ecology: strong relationships with habitat

- Live in many important coastal habitats like seagrasses, mangroves, reefs, estuaries and lagoons
- Once they find a place to call home, they become long-term residents
- Important predators on bottom-dwelling organisms
- Their strong links with habitat make them representative symbols of these places and the many marine conservation issues they face. Therefore, protections for seahorses benefit many other marine species and ecosystems.

Seahorse have economic value

- Global trade for aquaria, traditional medicine, and curios
- Trade involves over 80 countries and 26 species
- Important source of income and food security for subsistence fishers



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What threats do seahorses face?

From our research we know that seahorse biology and behaviour — for example, the young depend on parental survival far longer than most fish, and many species are seasonally monogamous — makes them particularly susceptible to overfishing, habitat loss, and other human pressures. We estimate tens of millions are internationally traded each year. For some species, these pressures have placed their populations under threat.

Here is what we know about seahorses in Philippines:

- The Philippines is a global hotspot for marine biodiversity.
- Ten seahorse species are known to occur in the Philippines.
- Seven out of the ten species are threatened and have a **global conservation status** of Vulnerable.
- The **global conservation status** of two pygmy seahorse species, Bargibant's pygmy seahorse and Denise's pygmy seahorse is **Data Deficient**. This means that we do not have enough information globally about where they live and the threats they face to identify conservation concerns.
- One pygmy seahorse species, Pontoh's pygmy seahorse, has a **global conservation status** of **Least Concern**.
- Seahorse species are known to inhabit seagrass beds, as well as other habitats, such as coral reefs and mangroves.
- Globally, seahorse species are traded for use as aquarium fishes, curios and traditional medicine.
- The Philippines is a major exporter of seahorses and the Philippines has not implemented CITES for Appendix II listed marine species - extraction and export of seahorses has been illegal since 2004.
- Updates to the Philippines Fisheries Code in 2015 may open the door for legal and sustainable seahorse fisheries and trade. This will help address illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the Philippines and strengthen protection of endangered marine species and critical conservation areas.

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Seahorse species found in the Philippines and their global conservation status

Species	Common Name	Global Conservation Status
<i>Hippocampus barbouri</i>	Barbour's seahorse	Vulnerable
<i>Hippocampus bargibanti</i>	Bargibant's pygmy seahorse	Data-Deficient
<i>Hippocampus comes</i>	Tiger-tail seahorse	Vulnerable
<i>Hippocampus denise</i>	Denise's pygmy seahorse	Data-Deficient
<i>Hippocampus histrix</i>	Thorny seahorse	Vulnerable
<i>Hippocampus kelloggi</i>	Great seahorse	Vulnerable
<i>Hippocampus kuda</i>	Spotted seahorse	Vulnerable
<i>Hippocampus pontohi</i>	Pontoh's pygmy seahorse	Least Concern
<i>Hippocampus spinosissimus</i>	Hedgehog seahorse	Vulnerable
<i>Hippocampus trimaculatus</i>	Three-spot seahorse	Vulnerable