



Seahorse Conservation



SEA LIFE is a global expert in breeding seahorses and has bred some rare species like the Indonesian zebra snouted seahorse and the hedgehog seahorse! Since 2015, SEA LIFE aquariums across the globe have successfully bred 15 different species of seahorse many of which are threatened with extinction in the wild.

We also help protect their homes by carrying out surveys of seahorses and seagrass beds in Europe and building 'seahorse hotels' in Australia.

White's Seahorse project - SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium

SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium is leading a pioneering project with several partners*, to restore the population of endangered White's seahorse in Sydney Harbour, Australia.

- The White's seahorse (*Hippocampus whitei*) is classed as Endangered by IUCN, numbers having declined dramatically in recent years.
- SEA LIFE Sydney Aquarium has been awarded a licence to collect and breed from 6 healthy pregnant couples from a population in an area of abundance in Sydney harbour. The babies from these couples will be reared to sub-adult age in the aquarium prior to release back into the wild.
- The long-term aim is to support the overall recovery of the species with the installation of 12 'Seahorse Hotels' in Sydney harbour where much of their natural seagrass, sponge and soft coral habitat has disappeared. These habitat cages will become encrusted and encourage the ongoing recovery and breeding of White's Seahorse.
- The seahorses will be tagged and tracked over 6-12 months to monitor their survival – and hopefully record them reproducing themselves.

*Partners – Department of Primary Industries NSW; University of Technology Sydney



Community Seagrass Initiative - UK

Seagrass beds are an important habitat for many species of seahorse. Between 2015 and 2017, Weymouth SEA LIFE Adventure Park supported a citizen science project – the Community Seagrass Initiative - led by the National Marine Aquarium in Plymouth, UK and funded by the National Lottery Fund. Over 400 volunteer divers helped survey over 500 hectares of seabed between Cornwall and Dorset.

- Seagrass beds are found in many parts of the world but they are severely threatened and declining in area by 7% a year.
- Coastal seagrass beds help to reduce greenhouse gasses. They can store up to twice as much carbon per square kilometre than tropical rainforests making them a very important “Blue Carbon” sink.
- A patch of seagrass roughly the size of a football pitch can support a staggering 40,000 fish. They provide important nursery areas for many commercially important fish and shellfish species including plaice, herring, pollack, scallops and cuttlefish.
- The seagrass beds along the south coast are also a preferred habitat for the Spiny Seahorse and the Short-Snouted Seahorse which are poor swimmers and hold onto seagrass blades with their tails.
- Weymouth SEA LIFE promoted the project to local communities and visitors through interpretation and hosted one of three project managers meetings and office space.
- Results from the survey contributed to the designation of several Marine Conservation Zones along the south coast and were published in the paper Ecology and Evolution.

