



# SEAHORSES OF INDIA

Seahorses belong to the family Syngnathidae and consist of only a single genus *Hippocampus*. There are 54 species of seahorses globally, of which 40 species are included in the IUCN Red List of threatened species. Of these, one is Endangered (EN), 10 are Vulnerable (VU), 1 is Least Concern (LC) and 27 are Data Deficient (DD).

Seahorses are quite unique in their reproductive behavior. During courting and mating, the female deposits eggs into the male's pouch. The male fertilizes, incubates, and delivers the hatchlings after a long period of pregnancy. Some seahorses develop devoted pair bonds, where a male and a female mate frequently and exclusively.

## INDIAN SEAHORSES

There have been reports of nine different species of seahorses in Indian waters:

*Hippocampus kuda* | *H. kelloggi* | *H. mohnikei*

*H. trimaculatus* | *H. spinosissimus* | *H. histrix*

*H. fuscus* | *H. borboniensis* | *H. camelopardalis*

Of the nine species of seahorses found in India, three (*H. kuda*, *H. histrix* and *H. trimaculatus*) species are found in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Elsewhere, they are encountered frequently in Tamil Nadu, in the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar regions, well-known for being abundant in sponges and seagrass beds. They have also been occasionally reported from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa and Karnataka.



## HABITAT

The preferred habitats of seahorses are seagrass beds and rocky and sandy shores. In the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, they seem to be found mostly in rocky and muddy mangrove areas followed by sandy habitats adjacent to coral reefs. Scuba divers have seen them in sandy habitats or anchored to sponges and coral reefs.

## PARENTAL CARE

Seahorses show parental care by males who incubate the eggs in their brood pouch. Before releasing the embryos as independent young seahorses, the male seahorses tend to them, guarding, aerating and feeding them.

## CONSERVATION STATUS

All species of Syngnathidae (seahorses and pipefishes) are classified in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 2023. All seahorses (*Hippocampus spp.*) have been listed in the Appendix II of CITES.

## THREATS

Seahorses and pipefishes are used in some countries as dried curios, ornamental fishes in aquariums, and for developing medicine since research suggests that seahorse extracts have potential antimicrobial properties. They are frequently caught as bycatch in nearshore areas primarily in gillnets and trawlers. Habitat destruction, combined with their low mobility and lengthy parental care, makes this organism vulnerable to decline.

