



Lined Seahorses

What are they?

Even though they look like many other creatures, all mixed together, seahorses are actually fish. There are many different kinds of seahorses around the world. Only one is native to the Chesapeake Bay. Scientists call lined seahorses *Hippocampus erectus*. *Hippocampus* was originally a Greek word for the creature that sea gods rode. *Hippo* means "horse," and *campus* mean "sea monster."

What do they look like?

Lined seahorses look almost as if someone had created them by putting parts of different animals together. Their heads resemble horses' head. Their eyes move independently, just as lizards do. They have bony outer plates, just like dinosaurs. They can use their tails to grasp things, just like monkeys. And they can change colors, just like chameleons.

Like other fish, lined seahorses have fins. They are located on their backs and on their sides. However, they move so quickly (beating about 20 – 30 times a second), you might not notice them at first. At the back of their head, they have a bony section called a coronet (A princess's small crown is also called a coronet). Each coronet is different from the other, just like a human fingerprint.

Male lined seahorses have a special pouch. They use it to carry and hatch eggs. They can carry up to 650 eggs at one time. After the baby seahorses hatch and have grown enough to swim, the males push them out of the pouch. Scientists estimate that only two of the hundreds of hatched seahorses actually grow up to be adults. Lined seahorses can be as large as five inches long. They swim with their heads up and their tails down.

Where can you find them?

You are most likely to find lined seahorses in the middle or lower Chesapeake Bay, their tails curled around eelgrass leaves in the shallow waters. When the eelgrass dies back in the winter, the lined seahorses move to deeper Bay areas. Sometimes, people find lined seahorses holding on to crab pots, especially in areas where eelgrass meadows have declined or disappeared.

How do they behave?

Like all fish, lined seahorses swim about. However, they can't swim very far or for very long. Their bodies weigh a lot in comparison to their fins and they like to swim in an erect position.

They spend most of their days eating, using their tails to latch on to eelgrass and other underwater plants. These creatures eat by sucking in water, eating the food they need, and spitting out whatever remains.

Lined seahorses can quickly change color to protect themselves from predators. They also do this to hide from the animals they are hunting. Scientists have also seen them change colors as they react to other seahorses. Some people say that they can do this more easily than chameleons can.

What do they eat?

Tiny shrimp, plankton, and worms are all part of the lined seahorses' diet. They can eat up to 3,000 tiny shrimp in a day, especially when they are young. Since they have no teeth, they swallow their food whole.

What eats them?

Crabs, skates, birds, sea turtles, and rays all eat lined seahorses.

Creature Feature

Lined seahorses face a number of problems. For many years, Asian people have used them for medicine. People often buy these curious creatures for their home aquariums or as souvenirs. Especially in the Chesapeake Bay, their habitat is disappearing. Because of all these factors, conservationists are working hard to make sure they are able to survive.



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