

Diving with

Pygmy Seahorses

Pygmy seahorses are a group of very small fish, between 1.4 and 2.7 cm in length. Two of these, Bargibant's and Denise's pygmy seahorses, live exclusively on the surface of gorgonian seafans. The seahorse's very small size, fragility and the delicate nature of their gorgonian home puts them and their seafans at risk from damage caused by divers. The Code of Conduct guidelines presented here aim to reduce the negative impact that divers have on these rare animals.



Bargibant's pygmy seahorse
(*Hippocampus bargibanti*)

Denise's pygmy seahorse
(*Hippocampus denise*)

Host

Gorgonian seafans of the genus *Muricella*

Identification

- Maximum length 2.7 cm
- Short pug-like snout
- Pronounced bumps over body
- Colours include pink, red and yellow with darker bumps

Hosts

Seven gorgonian and a whip coral species are known hosts

Identification

- Maximum length 2.4 cm
- Longer, slender snout
- Body can be smooth or bumpy
- Colour very variable, including pink, red, white and yellow

Gorgonian seafans

- Bargibant's and Denise's pygmy seahorses spend their entire adult life on a single gorgonian seafan, often inhabiting an area the size of a dinner plate, so the survival of their seafan home is vital for the seahorse.

- Seafans grow very slowly, reaching 100 years of age and several metres wide.
- Seafans are extremely delicate and easily damaged if touched.

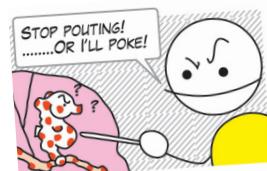
Threats

- Pygmy seahorses have the smallest populations of any known seahorse.
- Their biggest threats are habitat destruction and impacts from divers.

Code of Conduct

This code of conduct was created from hundreds of hours of behavioural scientific research, observing the impacts of diver interactions on pygmy seahorses.

CODE OF CONDUCT GUIDELINES



Do not touch or manipulate pygmy seahorses in any way, as this can easily damage or even kill them



Do not touch the gorgonian home of the seahorse (they are extremely slow growing and delicate), take particular care of camera position and exhalent bubbles



Do not use a torch/flashlight or camera focus light to highlight a pygmy seahorse, this disorients and stresses them



Five photo limit per diver using flash photography, as more can stress the animal



Use white balanced natural light rather than artificial light for video capture to reduce disturbance from bright lights



No night diving with pygmy seahorses - they sleep at night and lights disturb them



Be aware of the surrounding environment, pay close attention to fin positioning, so not to damage other corals

Created with generous support from Wakatobi Dive Resort, Walea Dive Resort and Murex Dive
Drawings by Mean Mora-mmoraa.com, Design by VisarkStudio.com

For more information go to - OceanRealmImages.com
or contact Dr Richard Smith - Richard@OceanRealmImages.com