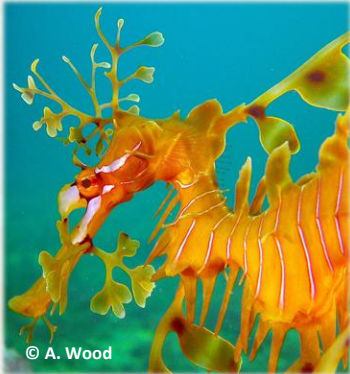


Leafy Seadragon

Phycodurus eques

The Leafy Seadragon is a narrow-bodied fish with a long snout. It has leaf-like appendages on the upper and lower sides of the body. 'Leafies' are golden-brown, with thin, white, vertical stripes along the body. The leaf-like appendages are olive-green or yellow-green, with darker brown spots. The colour and markings help leafy seadragons to camouflage in kelp and other seaweeds, and in seagrass. Leafies can grow to around 35cm long, but are usually seen at a smaller size.



Where do they live?

Leafy Seadragons are found in South Australia and Western Australia. They live in reef areas with kelp and other large seaweeds, and also near seagrass beds. Leafies are also found in mixed habitats of seagrass, patches of reef and sand. Seadragons also aggregate around some jetties, shipwrecks, artificial reefs and other built structures.

What is known about seadragon habits?

Since 2013, divers have been photographing seadragons at Rapid Bay in South Australia, for a community-based monitoring project. Seadragons can be identified by the shapes and patterns on their head and appendages. Some seadragons at Rapid Bay are 'jetty residents'. They stay in the same area for years; move offshore at certain times, and then return to the same place. Some male seadragons carry two broods per season.



What do they eat?

Seadragons eat mysids, and other small, shrimp-like crustaceans. The mysids often swarm at the edges of seagrass beds or reef. Leafy seadragons suck the mysids up, using their long, tube-like snouts.

Do they have eggs?

Yes. During the spring and summer breeding season, each female transfers 250-300 eggs to her partner male. The male broods the eggs in a spongy area under his tail for around 7 weeks. Males sometimes move to deeper water at brooding time, and then return to shallower water after the young are released.



Make Space for Seadragons

Seadragons are delicate fishes that can easily be injured. Never touch or chase a seadragon. If you are lucky enough to see one, please respect its space, and stay at least 2 metres away from it.

References: Baker J., Macdonald J., Macdonald P., Baade L., Rath R., Aston D. *et al.* (2020) *Leafy seadragon population monitoring in the AMLR NRM region: pilot study at Rapid Bay*. Report for Natural Resources Adelaide & Mt Lofty Ranges, Adelaide, South Australia.

Natural Resources Adelaide & Mt Lofty (undated) *Leafy Seadragon Phycodurus eques*. Bioregion fact sheet.

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