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Leafy seadragon

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Not to be confused with [Common seadragon](#).

The **leafy seadragon** or **Glauert's seadragon**, *Phycodurus eques*, is a marine [fish](#) in the family [Syngnathidae](#), which includes [seadragons](#), [pipefish](#), and [seahorses](#). It is the [only member](#) of the genus ***Phycodurus***.

It is found along the southern and western coasts of [Australia](#). The name is derived from the appearance, with long leaf-like protrusions coming from all over the body. These protrusions are not used for propulsion; they serve only as [camouflage](#). The leafy seadragon propels itself by means of a [pectoral fin](#) on the ridge of its neck and a [dorsal fin](#) on its back closer to the tail end. These small fins are almost completely transparent and difficult to see as they undulate minutely to move the creature sedately through the water, completing the illusion of floating [seaweed](#).

Leafy seadragon



Conservation status

Extinct EW Threatened CR EN VU **NT** Least Concern LC

Near Threatened (IUCN 3.1)^[1]

Scientific classification

Kingdom: [Animalia](#)

Phylum: [Chordata](#)



Popularly known as "leafies", it is the marine emblem of the state of [South Australia](#) and a focus for local marine conservation.^{[2][3]}

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Description [edit]

Much like the [seahorse](#), the leafy seadragon's name is derived from its resemblance to another creature (in this case, the mythical [dragon](#)). While not large, they

- Class: [Actinopterygii](#)
- Order: [Syngnathiformes](#)
- Family: [Syngnathidae](#)
- Subfamily: [Syngnathinae](#)
- Genus: ***Phycodurus***
T. N. Gill, 1896
- Species: ***P. eques***

Binomial name

Phycodurus eques

(Günther, 1865)



Phycodurus eques range

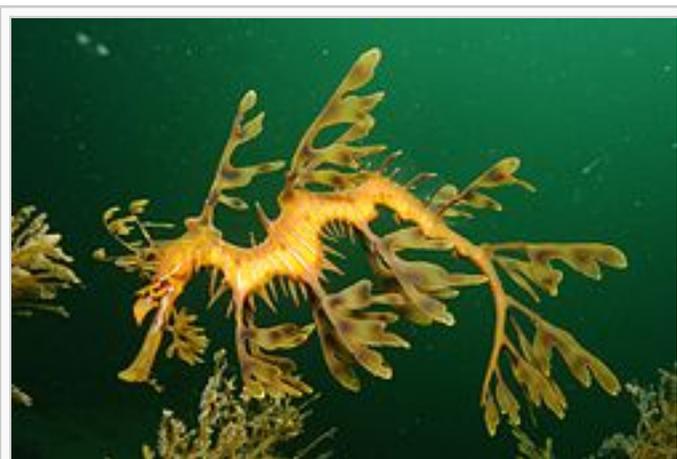
Synonyms

Phycodurus glauerti Whitley, 1939

magyar
Nederlands
日本語
Polski
Português
Русский
Sicilianu
Slovenščina
Suomi
Svenska
ไทย
Türkçe
Tiếng Việt
Winaray
中文

 Edit links

are slightly larger than most seahorses, growing to about 20–24 cm (8–10 in). They feed on [plankton](#) and small crustaceans.



Leafy seadragon in the wild 

The lobes of skin that grow on the leafy seadragon provide [camouflage](#), giving it the appearance of seaweed.^[4] It is able to maintain the illusion when swimming, appearing to move through the water like a piece of floating seaweed. It can also change colour to blend in, but this ability depends on the seadragon's diet, age, location, and stress level.

The leafy seadragon is related to the [pipefish](#) and belongs to the family [Syngnathidae](#), along with the seahorse. It differs from the seahorse in appearance,

form of locomotion, and its inability to coil or grasp things with its tail. A related species is the [weedy seadragon](#), which is multicoloured and grows weed-like fins, but is smaller than the leafy seadragon. Another unique feature are the small, circular gill openings covering tufted gills, very unlike the crescent-shaped gill openings and ridged gills of most fish species.^[5]

Habitat and distribution [[edit](#)]

The leafy seadragon is found only in southern Australian waters, from [Wilson's Promontory](#) in [Victoria](#) at the eastern end of its range, westward to [Jurien Bay](#), 220 km (140 mi) north of [Perth](#) in [Western Australia](#).^{[1][6]} Individuals were once thought to have very restricted ranges; but further research has discovered that seadragons actually travel several hundred metres from their habitual locations, returning to the same spot using a strong sense of direction. They are mostly found over sand patches in waters up to 50 m (164 ft) deep, around kelp-covered rocks and clumps of sea grass.^[2] They are commonly sighted by scuba divers near [Adelaide](#) in South

Australia, especially at [Rapid Bay](#), [Edithburgh](#), and [Victor Harbor](#).^{[7][8]}

Ecology [\[edit \]](#)

Leafy seadragons usually live a solitary lifestyle. When the time comes, males court the females, they then pair up to breed. From the moment they hatch, leafy seadragons are completely independent. By the age of two, they are typically full grown and ready to breed.^[9]

The species feeds by sucking up small crustaceans, such as [amphipods](#) and [mysid shrimp](#), [plankton](#), and larval fish through its long, pipe-like snout.^[2]

Reproduction [\[edit \]](#)

As with seahorses, the male leafy seadragon cares for the [eggs](#). The female produces up to 250 bright pink eggs, then deposits them onto the male's tail with her ovipositor, a long tube. The eggs then attach themselves to a brood patch, which supplies them with oxygen. After 9 weeks, the eggs begin to hatch, depending on water conditions. The eggs turn a ripe purple or orange over this period, after which the male pumps his tail until the young emerge, a process which takes place over 24–48 hours. The male aids in the eggs hatching by shaking his tail, and rubbing it against seaweed and rocks. Once born, the young seadragon is completely independent, eating small [zooplankton](#) until large enough to hunt [mysids](#). Only about 5% of the eggs survive. Leafy seadragons take about 28 months to reach sexual maturity.^[10]

Movement [\[edit \]](#)

The leafy seadragon uses the fins along the side of its head to allow it to steer and turn. However, its outer skin is fairly rigid, limiting mobility. Individual leafy seadragons have been observed remaining in one location for extended periods of time (up to 68 hours), but will sometimes move

for lengthy periods. The tracking of one individual indicated it moved at up to 150 m (490 ft) per hour.^[11]

Conservation [\[edit \]](#)

Leafy seadragons are subject to many threats, both natural and man-made. They are caught by collectors, and used in [alternative medicine](#). They are vulnerable when first born, and are slow swimmers, reducing their chance of escaping from a predator. Seadragons are often washed ashore after storms, as unlike their relative the seahorse, seadragons cannot curl their tails and hold onto seagrasses to stay safe.^[12]

The species has become endangered through [pollution](#) and industrial runoff, as well as collection for the aquarium trade. In response to these dangers, the species has been totally protected in South Australia since 1987, [Victoria](#) since at least 1995, and [Western Australia](#) since 1991. Additionally, the species' listing in the [Australian government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*](#) means that the welfare of the species has to be considered as a part of any developmental project.^{[1][13][14]}

In captivity [\[edit \]](#)

Due to being protected by law, obtaining seadragons is often an expensive and difficult process as they must be from captive bred stock, and exporters must prove their broodstock were caught before collecting restrictions went into effect, or that they had a license to collect seadragons. Seadragons have a specific level of protection under federal fisheries legislation as well as in most Australian states where they occur.^[1] Seadragons are difficult to maintain in aquaria. Success in keeping them has been largely confined to the public aquarium sector, due to funding and knowledge that would not be available to the average enthusiast. Attempts to breed the leafy

seadragon in [captivity](#) have so far been unsuccessful.^[15] Aside from the legalities, leafy seadragons cost between \$10,000-\$15,000 a piece, prohibitive to most collectors.^[citation needed]

This list is [incomplete](#); you can help by [expanding it](#).

Australia [\[edit \]](#)

Australian aquaria featuring leafy seadragons include the [Sydney Aquarium](#),^[16] the [Melbourne Aquarium](#), and the [Aquarium of Western Australia](#).^[17]

Canada [\[edit \]](#)

[Ripley's Aquarium of Canada](#) in Toronto displays both leafy and weedy seadragons.^{[18][19]}

United States [\[edit \]](#)

A number of aquaria in the United States have leafy seadragon research programs or displays. Among these are the [Adventure Aquarium](#) in Camden, New Jersey,^[20] [Aquarium of the Pacific](#) at Long Beach,^[21] the [Birch Aquarium](#) at Scripps, San Diego,^[22] the [Minnesota Zoo](#),^[23] the [Monterey Bay Aquarium](#)^[24] in California, the [Dallas World Aquarium](#), Texas,^[25] the [New England Aquarium](#), Boston,^[26] the [Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium](#) in Tacoma, Washington,^[27] the [Shedd Aquarium](#), Chicago,^[28] the [California Academy of Sciences](#),^[29] the [Tennessee Aquarium](#),^[30] [Sea World Orlando](#), Florida^[citation needed], the [Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium](#),^[citation needed], [Ripley's Aquarium of the Smokies](#) Gatlinburg, Tennessee^[citation needed], and The Florida Aquarium in Tampa, Florida.^[citation needed] and the Mote Aquarium in Sarasota, Florida.^[citation needed], [Ripley's Aquarium Broadway at the Beach](#) Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.^[citation needed]

Cultural references [\[edit \]](#)

The leafy seadragon is the official marine emblem of the state of South Australia.^[31] It also features in the logos of the following South Australian associations — the Adelaide University Scuba Club Inc. and the [Marine Life Society of South Australia Inc.](#)^{[32][33]}

A biennial [Leafy Sea Dragon Festival](#) is held within the boundaries of the [District Council of Yankalilla](#) in South Australia. It is a festival of the environment, arts and culture of the [Fleurieu Peninsula](#), with the theme of celebrating the leafy seadragon. The inaugural festival in 2005 attracted over 7,000 participants including 4000 visitors.^[34]

In 2006 an animated short film, *The amazing adventures of Gavin, a Leafy Seadragon*, was made on behalf of several South Australian organisations involved in conserving the marine environment, including the Coast Protection Board, the [Department of Environment and Heritage](#) and the Marine Discovery Centre.^{[35][36][37]} Made through a collaboration of [The People's Republic of Animation](#), Waterline Productions and the [SA Film Corporation](#),^[38] the film is an introductory guide to marine conservation and the marine bioregions of South Australia suitable for 8-12 year olds,^[39] and copies were distributed on DVD to all primary schools in the State. An educator's resource kit to accompany the film was released in 2008.^{[40][41]}

This animal is reported as being the basis of *Dragalge* from Generation 6 of the [Pokémon Series](#).^[42]

This animal also has two pages devoted to it in [Michael Hearst's](#) book, *Unusual Creatures* where all of the unusual things about it are listed.^[43]

See also [\[edit \]](#)

- [Weedy seadragon](#)

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External links [[edit](#)]

Australia

- [Australian Museum > Leafy Seadragon](#)  Retrieved 8 August 2011.
- [Marine Life Society of South Australia > Leafy Seadragon photos](#)  Retrieved 8 August 2011.
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- [Fused Jaw > Keep a Watchful Eye on the Sea Dragons of Southern Australia](#) Retrieved 8 August 2011.
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- [Phycodurus eques](#) - IUCN database entry includes a range map and a lengthy justification of why this species is near threatened.

Categories: [IUCN Red List near threatened species](#) | [Syngnathidae](#) | [Fish of Australia](#)
| [Emblems of South Australia](#) | [Monotypic fish genera](#)

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