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SEAHORSE BIOLOGY

The exact number of seahorse species around the world is unknown, though Kuitert (2000) suggests the number to be in the order of 60, of which 25 are found in Australia. Seahorse Australia's Southern Knights (*Hippocampus bleekeri* - formerly included with *H. abdominalis*) are found only in south-eastern Australian waters. It is one of the largest of seahorses growing up to about 25cm by 4 years of age. They have a variety of attractive body patterns and colours and often have a 'head dress' of tentacle-like appendages called filaments. These features, together with their graceful disposition and long life span (up to 3-4 years in captivity), make Southern Knight's Aquariums a wonderful addition to any home.

Remarkably, for seahorses it is the male who becomes pregnant and gives birth. The female transfers her eggs into the male's pouch where they are nurtured for 30 days (varies for other species). Typically Southern Knights give birth to around 250 babies, although Seahorses Australia has recorded broods as large as 1116.

Southern Knights Information at a glance

Distribution of Southern Knights

- * Victorian coast line.
- * Great Australian Bight and South Australian Gulf regions.
- * Tasmania, including the Tamar and Derwent estuaries. Often found clinging to nets at coastal aquaculture facilities.

Size

- Up to 25cm in length at 4 years of age (depending on diet and care).

Weight

- 50-70g fully grown

Colour and appearance

- * Great variety, ranging from silver-white, orange, black to dark gold.
- * Some specimens heavily spotted, others without spots
- * Male pouch distinctively white, darkening during pregnancy

- * Many individuals have a 'crown' adorning their head, which is highly sought after in the aquarium trade

Fecundity

- * Large individuals give birth to over 250 fry per pregnancy
- * In the wild 3-4 births per male during summer
- * During winter, many males in a pregnant state

First mating

- * Southern Knights are able to reproduce from 6 months of age.

Breeding

- * After a spectacle of a courtship, the female passes her eggs to the male, who fertilises them in his pouch.
- * Males give birth to live young after a gestation period between 30 & 50 days, depending on water temperature
- * Previously mated females will mate with non-pregnant males during this time

Growth rates

- * Newborn fry about 21mm in length
- * Reach 12cm in 8 months
- * One-year old fish may weigh up to 5g

Longevity

- * Unknown in the wild
- * In captivity, an average 3 years, some enthusiastic hobbyists have reported up to 5 years

Food

- * In the wild, live crustacea and small fish
- * Seahorse Australia's captive bred Southern Knights readily accept live and frozen Mysid shrimp, brine shrimp (*Artemia*) and krill. These foods are sold in pet and aquarium shops.