

# JR FACT FILE



## WEEDY SEADRAGON

*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*



Photo © John Arien

### AT A GLANCE

#### Size:

Grows up to 46 centimetres in length.

#### What It Eats:

Plankton, sea lice, larval fishes and small shrimp-like crustaceans called mysids.

#### Life Span:

They can live for up to 10 years in the wild.

#### Habitat:

Shallow coastal waters of southern Australia in kelp forests, reef edges, seagrass meadows and seaweed beds.

#### What Is a Weedy Seadragon?

Weedy Seadragons are delicate, shy animals that swim slowly and gracefully. Long leaf-shaped flaps of skin protrude from stalk-like bony projections at intervals along the top and bottom of the body. They have an amazing colour pattern, with an orange-red background colour, bright blue stripes and many white spots and yellow markings.

As well as looking like seaweed, seadragons move in a similar swaying motion as seaweed would in the water current. This enables them to camouflage themselves and hide from prey.

Tiny fins are found on either side of their head for balance and a long shimmering dorsal fin along their back propels their body through the water. They are, however, not strong swimmers and are often found washed ashore after storms.

The Weedy Seadragon has been Victoria's official marine faunal emblem since 2002.

The southern relative of the Weedy Seadragon is the Leafy Seadragon. They are all members of the Syngnathidae family (pronounced sing-nay-thid-day) which also includes seahorses and pipefish.

Weedy Seadragons are easily injured and should not be handled.

#### Threats:

While larger fish prey on young Weedy Seadragons, adults have few if any predators. They are the ultimate masters of disguise! Marine pollution, habitat destruction

and the international aquarium trade are the largest threats to the Weedy Seadragon.

The Weedy Seadragon is fully protected under the Victorian Fisheries Act 1995.

#### Where Does a Weedy Seadragon Live?

Weedy Seadragons are found only in southern Australian waters. They live in coastal waters from Port Stephens in New South Wales down to the southern coast of Australia including Tasmania, and up to Geraldton in Western Australia.

They are found in shallow waters, up to 50 metres in depth and are most commonly inhabit kelp forests, reef edges, seagrass meadows, seaweed beds and pier pylons.

#### What Does a Weedy Seadragon Eat?

Using its long, thin, tubular snout the Weedy Seadragon uses powerful suction to draw water and prey into its mouth. Special muscles in the snout can widen it to capture different sizes of food. Their diet consists mainly of small crustaceans and sea lice.

# WEEDY SEADRAGON

*Phyllopteryx taeniolatus*

## FASCINATING FACTS:

- THE WEEDY SEADRAGON WAS SELECTED AS VICTORIA'S OFFICIAL MARINE FAUNAL EMBLEM IN 2002.
- THE MALES CARRY THE EGGS FROM FERTILISATION TO HATCHING.
- SEADRAGONS ARE NOT VERY STRONG SWIMMERS AND ARE OFTEN WASHED ASHORE AFTER STORMS.

## A Weedy Seadragon's Family Life:

Breeding occurs annually, usually in late spring. Prior to mating, the male Weedy Seadragon prepares the area of his tail where he will keep the eggs. His tail becomes slightly swollen, soft and spongy. The female lays up to 300 eggs on this area and they are fertilised. The male seadragon carries these eggs for two months after which hatching occurs over a period of 6 days.

Baby Weedy Seadragons hatch as miniature versions of the adults, just 2.5 centimetres long. Within 3 weeks they more than double in size to 7 centimetres. After around two years they will reach their maximum size, which can be up to 46 centimetres.

Weedy Seadragons can live for up to 10 years in the wild.

## Where to see a Weedy Seadragon in the Wild?

Victoria's variety of marine sanctuaries and marine national parks such as the Point Addis Marine National Park are great areas to explore and spot Weedy Seadragons in their natural environment.

## Want to Know More?

[www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)

[www.dse.vic.gov.au](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au)