

Care Sheet

SOUTHERN KNIGHT SEAHORSES

(TANK BRED TEMPERATE SPECIES)

Hippocampus abdominalis

Southern Knight Seahorses are temperate marine fish found in coastal waters of south-eastern Australia and also in New Zealand. Seahorses belong to the family Sygnathidae which has over 200 species (half of which occur in Australian waters.) This species is also known as the Large-belly or Big-belly Seahorse.

Seahorses are unique animals, which make spectacular aquarium subjects. They have a graceful manner, attractive colouration and are reported to live for up to 9 years in captivity. They also have an unusual prehensile tail, which is used to hold onto seaweed or the substrate. Another unusual feature is that when Seahorses breed, the male holds the eggs in a pouch and gives birth to hundreds of tiny live seahorses!



Their strange appearance has long fascinated mankind and many people still consider them almost as a mystical creature! Southern Knight Seahorses are now being commercially produced in Australia, helping to ensure that wild stocks are not over-exploited.

Being tank reared, these fish are surprisingly easy to keep. They are quite tolerant of varying water salinity and temperature, will eat frozen foods and come from a disease free hatchery. Being a temperate species, they can also be kept in an unheated indoor aquarium in most regions of Australia.

TANK SET UP

- Can be kept in filtered aquaria of 40 litres capacity or more.
- For commercial stocking, up to sixteen 10cm Seahorses can be housed in a 40 litre tank with under gravel filtration. For the hobbyist's tank, 4-6 seahorses per 40 litres is recommended to allow for growth. Allow at least 50 litres water capacity for each adult pair of Southern Knight Seahorses.
- Twenty-five percent water change should be done each fortnight, (increase to 50% for the first 4-6 weeks).
- Seahorses require very well oxygenated water, so air uplifts are essential - standard air-driven under gravel filters and airstones are ideal.
- Substrate should be shell grit or crushed coral, or a 50/50 mixture of aquarium gravel and shell grit. Tank decorations should be added for the Seahorses to hang on to – well seasoned driftwood or plastic plants, which are not too spiky, are ideal. Rocks can also be utilized. Do not place live corals in with the Seahorses as the corals may sting and kill them within several days.
- Seahorses are best kept without any other fish species, as their gentle nature does not allow them to compete for food.

MAXIMUM SIZE:

Grows to 20–25cm in Australian waters, grows to 30cm in New Zealand in cooler conditions.

COLOURATION:

Colours can vary as Seahorses are able to mimic their surroundings. Usually olive, white or golden, with variable dark spotting.

TEMPERATURE RANGE:

Southern Knight Seahorses soon adjust to temperatures within 12-24°C, with optimum temperatures being 15-21° C. Aquarium heaters are not required in most indoor situations. During heat wave conditions, ensure air stones are operating strongly to ensure optimum oxygen levels, and use air conditioning or party ice to hold the temperature below 25°C.

WATER CONDITIONS:

- Requires either seawater or artificial seawater (1.020 specific gravity). When preparing artificial seawater, ensure the water used contains no chlorine, or has been treated with an anti-chlorine agent.
- pH: preferably 8.2 - 8.4, do not exceed 9.0.
- Do not use aquarium water that has previously held other fish or invertebrates.
- Although Seahorses are quite tolerant to ammonia and nitrite, their biological filter will still need to fully establish before the tank is fully stocked.

FEEDING:

Southern Knight Seahorses have been trained to eat frozen brine shrimp and frozen plankton but should not be fed exclusively on brine shrimp. Small frozen krill, mysis shrimp and mixed ocean plankton are all readily available and make ideal foods. Ensure no uneaten food remains in the aquarium.

BREEDING:

Southern Knight Seahorses begin breeding at 4 months of age. Males can be recognized by their belly pouch, they actually inflate the pouch to its' maximum extent to try and impress potential mates. During spawning females transfer their eggs to the male's pouch where they are nurtured for about 30-50 days, depending on temperature. Large specimens release broods of 300 - 400 fry. In the wild, males release 3 or 4 broods over summer. The male's pouch is white and darkens in colour as the eggs develop. Newborn fry are about 21mm long and can be fed on live baby brine shrimp.

HEALTH:

These seahorses are regularly checked to ensure they are in good health. The key to their well being is good water quality and good food, (particularly when kept in smaller aquariums).

UNPACKING PROCEDURE:

Before unpacking, please check temperature of both shipping water and future holding tank. Carefully follow the Aquarium Industries unpacking guidelines as Southern Knight Seahorses are very sensitive to sudden increases in temperature.

*Please note: If the tank is warmer than the shipping water, lower the temperature by adding ice. (Party ice is ideal, as it is chlorine free). The effect of the ice on salinity will be negligible. When the temperatures have equalized, release the Seahorses. The aquarium water temperature will then gradually return to its' previous temperature. If the holding tank is colder than the transport bag, float the unopened bag for 5-10 minutes or until the temperatures equalize, before releasing the Seahorses.

SUMMARY:

Southern Knight Seahorses make a fascinating and enjoyable pet. They are also quite easy to keep - if given a few simple requirements such as the correct temperature, filtered water, regular water changes, and correct feeding.