

Seahorse Rescue Advice



What to Do If You Find a Seahorse Washed Up on the Shore or see one Underwater

If You Find a LIVE Seahorse on the Beach or whilst crabbing

1. Act Quickly

A seahorse washed ashore is in danger and may die if left exposed, especially if the sun is hot. The Seahorse Trust and UK government guidance advises that live stranded seahorses should be returned to the sea immediately. [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk)

Seahorses can become highly stressed which might lead to death and so:

2. Handle With Great Care

- Wet your hands first if you need to touch it.
- Be as gentle as possible.
- Never squeeze the seahorse or pull on the tail.
- Don't bang or make loud noises near the seahorse as this will stress it. If you have put it into a bucket, then don't tap or bang the side of the bucket or the surface it is on as this is very stressful for seahorses as sound underwater is amplified.

3. Return It to Suitable Water

- Place it back into calm, sheltered seawater where possible.
- Avoid breaking surf and heavy waves as this might just wash it back ashore.
- If safe, place it near seaweed, seagrass or other natural cover where it can hold on.
- If seagulls are around then try and put it somewhere undercover in the water, so the seagulls cannot eat it.

4. Record the Sighting

- Take a photograph (without flash or lights), if possible, preferably against a measurable object, such as a credit card or your hand, this will help our research and the information gathered will ensure a better future for seahorses in the wild.
 - We can learn so much from clear photographs, such as species, sex, health etc.
 - Note the exact location, date and time, what the weather is doing, what type of habitat is in the area (if on a beach, just say on the beach)
 - Report the sighting to The Seahorse Trust by email on theseahorsetrust@gmail.com or phone them on 07876513628 or if none of this is possible then through their World Seahorse Survey. <https://www.theseahorsetrust.org/conservation/world-seahorse-survey-2/>
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If You Find a DEAD Seahorse on the Beach

Do Not Throw It Back in the sea.

A dead seahorse can still provide valuable conservation and biological information.

Record Details

- Photograph it from several angles.
- Photograph against a measurable object.
- Record the exact location.
- Note the date and any identifying features.

Send it to us

If possible, collect the dead seahorse and put it in a bag and send it to us. Even when they are dead, we can learn so much about them.

To send it to us make sure it is double wrapped in a plastic bag or if possible dry it. When you send it to us, put in a double wrapped bag, then put it in a jiffy bag or box, put it in an envelope, with a covering letter and send it to us at:

The Seahorse Trust

36 Greatwood Terrace

Topsham

Devon EX3 0EB

Report It

Send details and photographs to The Seahorse Trust at theseahorsetrust@gmail.com , who collect records throughout the World Seahorse Survey <https://www.theseahorsetrust.org/conservation/world-seahorse-survey-2/> to help monitor seahorse populations and conservation issues. [\[theseahorsetrust.org\]](https://www.theseahorsetrust.org/)

Please include when and where the seahorse sighting occurred, and, where possible (without disturbance occurring), a photograph. If possible, location on a map, GPS coordinates, a grid reference or What3words to give more precise location are particularly helpful.

If You See a Seahorse Underwater

<https://www.theseahorsetrust.org/divers-page/>

Observe, Don't Interfere

Seahorses are legally protected in the UK and many other countries.

Both native UK species are protected under wildlife legislation. [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk)

Follow These Rules

- ✓ Stay calm and keep your distance, it is very easy to become very excited seeing a seahorse, this in turn could cause stress.
 - ✓ Observe for no more than five minutes.
 - ✓ Allow the seahorse to behave naturally.
 - ✓ Keep hoses, cameras and equipment clear of the seabed.
 - ✓ Try and take a few pictures but without lights or a flash as this could kill them.
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- ✗ Do not touch or move it
 - ✗ Do not chase it
 - ✗ Do not pick it up
 - ✗ Do not surround it with several people
 - ✗ Do not use flash photography [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk), [\[bsac.com\]](https://www.bsac.com)

Signs a Seahorse Is Stressed

Move away immediately if the seahorse:

- Swims away suddenly
- Makes erratic movements

- Appear to make itself smaller by tucking its head into its chest
 - Darkens in colour
 - Lies flat on the seabed
 - Turns its back on you
 - Drops down and remains motionless
 - Rises unusually high into the water column
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Additional information

Important Legal Reminder

UK seahorses are protected wildlife. Do not collect, keep, disturb or deliberately handle seahorses unless appropriately licensed. [\[gov.uk\]](https://www.gov.uk)

In many countries seahorses are legally protected, please check with the in country authorities to see if the seahorses are protected, if in doubt, assume they are protected.

The golden rule:

If in doubt, leave the seahorse where it is, minimise disturbance, and report the sighting.

In the UK, section 9 of the [Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981](#) protects both species of seahorse native to the UK: Spiny or sometimes wrongly called the long-snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus guttulatus*) and short snouted seahorse (*Hippocampus hippocampus*). The offences are listed in Table 1. Seahorses are also protected by [The Control of Trade in Endangered Species Regulations 2018](#).

You must have a wildlife licence if you are diving or snorkelling and intending to do something likely to disturb seahorses. This could be taking photographs or filming. Intentionally disturbing seahorses without a wildlife licence could lead to enforcement action.

MMO may issue a [wildlife licence](#) for specific reasons, this may include activities which are completed for scientific or educational purposes.

MMO will consider applications for wildlife licences to allow seahorses to be photographed using flash photography on a case-by-case basis only.

An [independent scientific review](#) concluded that flash photography at high levels can disturb seahorses, especially when combined with other activities. It may be possible to reduce the

effects using conditions on licences issued. MMO will update advice if new evidence and scientific knowledge becomes available.

If you encounter a seahorse whilst swimming or diving, to reduce any potential disturbance:

- Do not spend more than five minutes observing a seahorse;
- Never move or touch a seahorse, it is common to find seahorses lying motionless on the seafloor;
- Do not crowd a seahorse with multiple persons surrounding it;
- Do not pursue a seahorse if they swim away;
- If a seahorse displays signs of stress, you must retreat slowly to at least 5 metres away, avoiding sudden movement;
- Ensure your equipment (such as hoses and gauges) is tucked away, and your arms and legs do not dangle down onto or drag across the seabed.

The following list describes typical behaviour displayed by stressed seahorses:

- A seahorse may swim away or make erratic movements;
- A seahorse may rise up into the water column above the seabed or into surrounding area and swim with its tail curled up;
- A seahorse may hold its head in a downward, chest hugging posture;
- A seahorse may turn its back, curl up, lie flat or move away;
- A seahorse's colouring may darken, especially in the squares amongst the body ridges.

MMO recommends following the [seagrass and seahorse diving guidance note](#)) when diving or snorkelling in areas of seagrass or known seahorse locations.

Reporting seahorse sightings

Records of seahorse distribution are vital for their conservation. Any sightings of seahorses whether in the sea, or stranded, should be shared with The Seahorse Trust by emailing the Seahorse Team, at theseahorsetrust@gamil.com

Please include when and where the seahorse sighting occurred, and, where possible (without disturbance occurring), a photograph. If possible, location on a map, GPS coordinates, a grid reference or What3words to give more precise location are particularly helpful.