

Sea Life of the Mar Menor

Last week in my article about jellyfish I mentioned the fact that turtles are thought to have lived in the Mar Menor. Unfortunately this fact has not been proven. This week I will write about another “mythical” creature of the Mar Menor, the seahorse. I say “mythical” because many people consider their presence in the Mar Menor to be a myth. However, there really are seahorses in the Mar Menor, but they are quite rare and very hard to spot.

The type of seahorse to be found in the Mar Menor is the *Hippocampus guttulatus* or Long-snouted Seahorse. These creatures are quite small, their maximum size is normally 15 cm (6”) however most are about half that size.

Seahorses may be found in seaweed beds or near algae covered rocks. Since they have a fringed mane which looks just like algae, they have great camouflage. Also, seahorses keep very still for long periods of time, which also makes them very hard to see.

Seahorses are a threatened species, you should never fish them out of the water to have a look or worse still dry them out to keep as a souvenir.

Another animal closely related to seahorse that may be found in the Mar Menor is the pipefish. Their head is a similar shape with a long snout, however, apart from that they look very different. They have long tube like bodies that can be up to 45 cm long. Like seahorses they live among algae covered rocks. When they are lying motionless among the algae they are almost invisible.

Seahorses and pipefish feed on small shrimp and tiny plankton. Many live with life-long partners and they are the only species’ in which the male becomes “pregnant”. In actual fact, the female lays



her eggs into the male’s brood pouch. The male then carries the offspring in this pouch at the base of the body, (see picture) which makes him appear to be pregnant.

Long-snouted Seahorse
Hippocampus guttulatus (ramulosus)

Length: max 15 cm.

The seahorse is not a strong swimmer and wraps its curled tail around fronds of seaweed to prevent it being washed away.



Black-striped Pipefish
Syngathus abaster

Length: max 45 cm



Pipefish swim in a leisurely fashion, normally in an upright position, gliding slowly through the water by means of rapid wave-like movements. If they need to move faster they can propel themselves forward by bending the body over and move forward in a series of jump-like movements.

Both pipefish and seahorses are covered in a tough segmented skin. This gives them a certain amount of protection from predators as it makes them fairly unpalatable.

During the next few articles I will write about the more common species that you are likely to see when you are snorkelling or paddling. After publication all articles will be posted on our website, so you don’t have to worry if you lose your copy of the Informer!

Lesley Singleton
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