

Collecting Seahorses

Supplement to the July 2008 FAMA Horse Forum column.

By Carol Cozzi-Schmarr

Q. I live in South Florida where we have a lot of sea grass beds near shore. Do you think I could collect any seahorses there for my aquarium?
—Jones

A. The seahorse that was once common but is now very rare in the sea grass beds in your area is *Hippocampus erectus*. This seahorse makes the best pet of all 36 species as far as I am concerned. This species — like all species of seahorses around the world — has virtually disappeared from the wild. In fact, the entire genus is now protected by Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). This means that you would not be legally allowed to take any seahorse out of the ocean.

Even if you were allowed to, wild-caught seahorses do not make good pets. They will not eat frozen Mysis and usually die within a few weeks after being taken. However, to see a wild seahorse in its natural habitat in the ocean is an amazing experience. For this reason, I suggest checking out your local sea grass beds for seahorses. And should you be lucky enough to find one — leave it where you find it. To increase your chances try at around 20 to 30 feet. Look carefully as they are masters of camouflage.

If you are lucky enough to find one, there's probably another. There may even be a pair. As long as food is plentiful and no one bothers them, they will stay in the same place for years. If you are so lucky as to find a wild pair of seahorses in your backyard, don't tell anyone who will be tempted to take them out of the water!

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