Keeping Seahorses

Keeping seahorses is a relatively simple process if a few simple rules are observed. Firstly sea horses are a very slow fish and they do not compete well for food with faster moving fish. Thus they are best kept in a small aquarium just with other seahorses. Other suitable tank mates may be small starfish, banded coral shrimp or perhaps mandarin fish.

To set up an aquarium for them, a minimum of 35 litres is required to keep two seahorses. A biological filter is required – this means that beneficial bacteria will build up in the filter to break down waste products. Many 'all in one' aquariums, which have filters and lighting built-in, are suitable.

Following is a step by step guide to setting up.

- Wash coral sand with tap water until clean. Note that water may look white from salts in the sand, but should not look dirty. Distribute sand over base of the aquarium.
- Either natural or artificial salt water can be used. If using natural sea water, clean supplies are available for purchase from our huge storage tank. If using artificial salt, fill aquarium with tap water and treat with *PRIME* to remove chlorine and ammonia.
- Start filter. Install heater, set for 24ºC. Our seahorses are a tropical species and unlike cold water seahorses, do not require a chiller to maintain. They do, however, require a temperature of 24ºC which will mean heating the tank, especially in winter.
- Once the filter has been started it should be run 24 hours per day as turning off the filter for extended periods of time will cause the bacteria to die. Lights should be run about 10 – 12 hours per day. It is preferable not to position the tank in strong natural light, particularly direct sunlight, as excess algae may grow as a result.
- Add artificial salt to the water. Approximately 34 grams to each litre of water is the correct ratio. Always add slightly less salt and allow the salt to fully dissolve, preferably overnight, before testing with the hydrometer. Float the hydrometer in the water and check if the water surface is opposite the green mark. In the middle of the green mark will be the desired salinity of 1.022. If the green mark is **below** the water level (1.020) then the water is too fresh. Add small amounts of salt, allowing to dissolve, until the correct level is reached. If the green mark is **above** the water level (1.030) then the water is too salty. Remove some of the water and top up with fresh water. This is why it is best to underestimate the amount of salt as it is easier to add more salt than take it out.
- Once correct salinity is achieved, add *STABILITY* at the rate of 5ml to 40 litres. A piece of live rock may be added to the tank at this time. This will help to establish the bacteria in the tank and provide extra surface area for bacteria to colonize. For the next 7 days, add *STABILITY* at the rate of 5ml to 80 litres every day.
- Test the ammonia levels in the tank and if a zero level is achieved, more live rock can be added. After a further week, provided ammonia levels remain at zero, the seahorses can be added.

Seahorses require small, frequent feedings of live or frozen brine shrimp or mysis shrimp. Add only small amounts which can be consumed in about five minutes.

To maintain your seahorses in a healthy condition, change about 20% of the aquarium water every month. It will be necessary to mix new salt water in a plastic bucket or container. Syphon out the water from the aquarium using a gravel washer. This allows dirt etc to be cleaned up off the bottom at the same time. Top up with new salt water.

If the water level in the aquarium drops from evaporation, it should be topped up with **fresh** water (tap water treated with PRIME), **NOT** seawater. This is because as the water evaporates, the salt is left behind and topping up with salt water will eventually make the water too salty. The only time salt water is used is when a water change if performed.

If the above steps are followed and you maintain regular water changes, you should have many years of enjoyment from your seahorses. For any further information and advice please contact:

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