# **GEORGIA AQUARIUM ANIMAL FACT SHEET**

## Weedy sea dragon

Phyllopteryx taeniolatus

## Range/Habitat

- The weedy sea dragon is found specifically around southern and western Australia to the southern tip of Tasmania.
- It is usually found in kelp forests, along reefs or within shallow, weedy areas of estuaries.
- The weedy sea dragon is usually found in depths between 0-160 feet (0-50 m), however they tend to live in shallower waters unless food is scarce.

## **Physical Characteristics**

- An adult weedy sea dragon is approximately 18 inches (45 cm) in length.
- Its body form is quite distinctive. It is long and compressed, though the females' bodies grow deeper with age, and it has long, leafy flaps of skin that project from the body and tail.
- This sea dragon actually belongs to the same family as sea horses (Syngnathidae), but unlike sea horses, it swims horizontally with its abdomen facing the bottom.
- It has a tube-like snout that is used like a drinking straw to suck up its food.
- The color and style of leafy appendages that develop are based on the sea dragon's food supply and environment and also vary with other factors like depth and geography.
- It is commonly olive-colored on the back with a lighter, yellow-hued and spotted coloring on its body. It has a network of about seven dark bluish lines along the trunk region. Its leaf-like appendages are purple with a dark edge.
- The weedy sea dragons from deep-water habitats tend to be less leafy and brighter in color.

## **Diet/ Feeding**

 The weedy sea dragon eats small crustaceans, worms and other animals including tiny mysid shrimp.

#### **Conservation Status**

- The weedy sea dragon is listed as endangered by the IUCN Red List.
- The sea dragon is protected by law and can only be imported by collectors with special permits.
- The sea dragon is a protected species in New South Wales and Tasmania.

#### **Additional Information**

- With their leaf-like fins and frilly appendages, they camouflage themselves perfectly
  among seaweed and sea grass beds. They're nearly impossible to find among the
  plants as they slowly sway back and forth with the current.
- The weedy sea dragon is a poor swimmer.
- An interesting fact about the weedy sea dragon is that it is the male of the species that "gives birth." During mating season, which usually starts in October or November, the female lays up to 250-300 eggs onto the soft bottom of the male's

tail. The eggs embed into the skin with "cup-like" structures that harden and form around each egg to hold and protect them during brooding. After about two months, the bright pink eggs hatch into miniature juveniles, which settle into the vegetation. Although they are small, less colorful and have a much shorter snout, the juvenile sea dragon is basically the form of an adult. Within days, it is on its own to hunt for survival, as weedy sea dragons are a solitary species.

#### Sources

www.Fishbase.org

<u>Seahorses, Pipefishes, and their relatives.</u> Kuiter, Rudie H., pgs 75-79 Reef Fishes

Fishes of the World, An Illustrated Dictionary. Wheeler, Alwyne, pg 286

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