

Year-old seadragons make debut at California aquarium

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More than a decade ago, Leslee Matsushige traveled to Australia to "study seadragons in the wild."

Matsushige observed the sea creatures' behaviors and habitats, the Birch Aquarium at Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego said in an April 2 news release.

With her newfound knowledge, the [aquarium](#) said the associate curator set out to "build a seadragon display," one that would be optimal for seadragons to mate and breed.

Now, after a male weedy seadragon's historic pregnancy resulted in 70 newborn seadragons in March 2023, the fruits of Matsushige's labor are "swimming into the spotlight," as five year-old weedy seadragons go on display at the aquarium.

"This moment is years in the making," Matsushige said in the release. "Everything we were hoping to happen, happened."

The weedy seadragon's pregnancy marked "the first successful transfer of eggs from a female seadragon to a male" at the Seadragons & Seahorses habitat at the Birch Aquarium, the aquarium said at the time.

The aquarium said the juveniles show "phenomenal success in the aquarium's seadragon conservation efforts."

While the seadragons spent a year behind the scenes, the aquarium said they have grown from over half an inch to about 9 inches long.

The aquarium said it believes the five are all male, but this will not be confirmed until they are about 2 years old.

Before the juvenile seadragons could be put on display, the aquarium said they were collected and photographed to help identify them.

"Much like human fingerprints are one-of-a-kind, seadragons exhibit

distinctive characteristics," the aquarium said. "Different combinations of unique facial features, patterns and appendage shapes help the aquarium's seadragon care team tell one seadragon from another."

After the creatures were photographed, they were placed in the aquarium's Seadragons & Seahorses display.

"These seadragons show that the design of our display works," Matsushige said. "We're excited to see them continue to thrive."

What to know about weedy seadragons

Weedy seadragons are native to Australia, according to the aquarium.

The species was listed as "near threatened" in 2006 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, according to the Aquarium of the Pacific.

They have since been downgraded to "least concern."

In addition to predators in the wild, other challenges the [species](#) face "include food scarcity, warming oceans and compromised habitats caused by [climate change](#)," Birch Aquarium said in a March 2023 news release.

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