



Seahorse Citizen Science

By **WAYNE B. BROWN**

I am always on the lookout for ways to get our guests more involved with conservation and outreach programs. We have recently teamed up with Project Seahorse for just this purpose.

A little background on Project Seahorse. It was started by Dr. Amanda Vincent, Dr. Heather Koldewey and Dr. Helen Stanley. When asked how three PHD's ended up creating this, Dr. Vincent said, "Project Seahorse grew out of the collaboration of our shared interest in seahorse biology and conservation. We were intent on generating knowledge and applying that knowledge to influence management and policy. From the beginning, we agreed that, whenever a decision had to be made about direction for our work, we would choose the option that was most likely to lead to conservation gains. We have held true to that commitment, always adapting, and growing into a global conservation organization that has won many accolades because of effective work, from fish to fisher and from local to global."

The approximately 46 known seahorse species live in coastal habitats, which are the most vulnerable habitats with pressure from pollution and seine fishing nets. Without vibrant, thriving coastal habitats, seahorses are perishing. Project Seahorse has



teamed up with iNaturalist to begin the citizen science project of reporting and mapping seahorses around the globe. iNaturalist was started in 2008 as a University of California, Berkeley Master's project and has become the largest observation mapping database in the world. As of December 2021, there were over 99 million observations recorded!

A subset database of iNaturalist was created called iSeahorse, which has already accumulated over

8,000 observations of 40 seahorse species. The Project Seahorse team wrote a PADI specialty instructor course that is available through an online Udemy training program that I first went through myself to understand the program and process. Then my operations team completed it and we have now started to roll it out to our scuba diving destination instructors. Once a destination's instructors have completed their certification, they will be able to offer two separate seahorse components for our guests. One will be to teach the complete seahorse specialty to our guests. The other component helps our guests identify and report to iSeahorse their observations, which does not require any formal certification. This part of iSeahorse – the citizen science – allows for the most possible observations helping to document seahorse populations and habitat. Project Seahorse can then use this data to understand if populations are increasing or if populations are threatened, helping local communities take corrective action.

Next time you are lucky enough to find a seahorse while diving, take as many photos as possible or remember as much detail as you can and become a citizen scientist helping the world's seahorse population through Project Seahorse. Learn more by going to www.projectseahorse.org [1]

Wayne B. Brown is Owner and CEO of Aggressor Adventures. A proud US Air Force veteran who resides with his family in Augusta GA.

Photo courtesy: Aggressor Adventures

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