

Seven Things You Need to Know About...the Harlequin Shrimp

By Dave Harasti

1. The harlequin shrimp (*Hymenocera elegans*) is a highly sought after animal by **UNDERWATER PHOTOGRAPHERS** because of its striking colouration, unusual shape, and unique charisma.
2. This species can be found throughout the Indo-western Pacific region; however, it's believed there is a separate, similar looking species with more reddish colouration, *Hymenocera picta*, **FOUND ONLY** in the central eastern Pacific. Many authors consider the two species to be the same and classified as either *H. elegans* or *H. picta*.
3. The body is white in **COLOUR** with large blue-purple coloured blotches with a black margin. The legs have blue banding and the shrimp has large, flattened, flamboyant front claws.
4. Harlequin shrimps are a **SEA STAR'S** nightmare, as sea stars (a.k.a. starfish) are the shrimps' main source of food. Once a shrimp finds a sea star it will overturn it and dine on the delicate tube feet – a large sea star may keep a pair of harlequins busy for several days. Harlequin shrimps are also known to feed on sea urchins.
5. It's believed that when a harlequin shrimp encounters a mate they **STAY TOGETHER** for life, forming what is known as a monogamous pair. After the female moults they mate and the female produces between 100 and 5,000 eggs per season, which she tends to and cleans until they hatch.
6. Harlequin shrimp tend to be **FOUND** in pairs on coral reefs in coastal bays and lagoons, where they seek shelter under rocks and ledges.
7. The harlequin shrimp can **GROW** to a maximum length of approximately five centimetres.



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