

Golden arowana (*Scleropages formosus*)

The *golden arowana* (*Scleropages formosus*), also known as the *Asian arowana* or *dragon fish*, is one of the most prized and iconic freshwater fish in the aquarium trade. Native to Southeast Asia, it is revered for its majestic appearance and cultural significance, often symbolizing luck, prosperity, and wealth. Here's a detailed description:

Physical Characteristics:

1. *Size*:

- Golden arowanas can grow very large, reaching lengths of up to 3 feet (90 cm) in the wild.
- In captivity, they typically grow to about 2–2.5 feet (60–75 cm).

2. *Coloration*:

- The golden arowana is named for its stunning metallic gold scales, which shimmer in the light.
- Some varieties may have a reddish or greenish tint, depending on their specific strain and genetics.
- The scales are large and overlapping, giving the fish a dragon-like appearance.

3. *Body Shape*:

- They have a long, sleek, and streamlined body with a flattened head and a large, upturned mouth.
- The body is muscular and built for powerful swimming.

4. *Fins*:

- The dorsal and anal fins are elongated and extend almost to the tail, giving the fish a ribbon-like appearance.
- The pectoral fins are large and wing-like, aiding in their ability to leap out of the water.
- The tail fin is fan-shaped and often has a reddish or golden hue.

5. *Barbels*:

- They have two prominent barbels (whisker-like sensory organs) protruding from the lower jaw, which help them detect prey.

Behavior:

1. *Surface Dwellers*:

- Golden arowanas are primarily surface-dwelling fish, often seen swimming near the top of the water.
- They are known for their incredible jumping ability, which they use to catch prey or escape predators. In the wild, they can leap several feet out of the water to catch insects, birds, or small animals.

2. *Diet*:

- They are carnivorous and feed on a variety of prey, including fish, insects, crustaceans, and even small mammals or birds.
- In captivity, they can be fed live or frozen foods such as fish, shrimp, crickets, and pellets.

3. *Temperament*:

- Generally solitary and territorial, especially as they grow larger.

- They can be aggressive toward other fish, particularly those of similar size or shape.

Habitat:

1. *Natural Environment*:

- Found in slow-moving rivers, lakes, and flooded forests with dense vegetation.
- Prefers warm, tropical climates.

2. *Water Conditions*:

- Temperature: 75–86°F (24–30°C).
- pH: 6.0–7.5.
- Soft to moderately hard water.

Aquarium Care:

1. *Tank Requirements*:

- Due to their large size, golden arowanas require a very spacious tank. A minimum of 250 gallons is recommended for a single adult, with larger tanks needed for multiple fish.
- The tank should be long and wide to accommodate their swimming habits.
- A tight-fitting lid is essential, as they are powerful jumpers.

2. *Tank Mates*:

- Compatible with large, peaceful fish that occupy different levels of the tank, such as large catfish or cichlids.
- Avoid keeping with smaller fish, as they may be seen as prey.

3. *Lifespan*:

- With proper care, golden arowanas can live for 10–15 years or more in captivity.

Cultural Significance:

- In many Asian cultures, the golden arowana is considered a symbol of good luck, prosperity, and wealth.
- It is often referred to as the "dragon fish" due to its resemblance to the mythical Chinese dragon.
- Because of its cultural importance, it is highly sought after and can command extremely high prices in the aquarium trade.

Conservation:

- The golden arowana is listed as *endangered* by the IUCN due to habitat destruction, pollution, and overfishing for the aquarium trade.
- It is protected under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and international trade is strictly regulated.
- Captive breeding programs have been established to help conserve the species and reduce pressure on wild populations.

Varieties:

1. *Crossback Golden Arowana*:

- The gold coloration extends over the entire back, including the dorsal fin.

2. *Highback Golden Arowana*:

- The gold coloration extends up to the fifth or sixth row of scales on the back.

3. *Red-Tail Golden Arowana*:

- Features a golden body with a reddish tail fin.

The golden arowana is a magnificent and highly prized fish, but it requires a significant commitment in terms of space, care, and maintenance. It is best suited for experienced aquarists with the resources to provide for its needs.