



## Golden/Asian Arowana (*Scleropages formosus*)

The arowana is popularly known to the Chinese as the Dragon fish because of its slender body and its distinct and reflective scales. To them, it does not simply resemble the mythical and mighty dragon but an incarnation of the dragon itself. Businessmen favour the arowana as pets, especially the Asian endemic ones, which they believe will bring them good luck and prosperity. They also strongly believe that the Asian Arowana brings them good health and happiness, casts out evil spirits and upholds family togetherness. This interest has thus spread to Thailand, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Japan in spite of the fish being listed as an endangered and protected species and prohibited from trade worldwide by the Convention in Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES), which only allows limited trade of an allocated annual quota from Indonesia. But with Singapore's success in breeding this fish in captivity, CITES had approved worldwide trade of the Singapore captive-bred dragon fish in August, 1994.

To ecologists, Arowana is a rare highly threatened species with a fantastic habit. It generally lives in peat swamps. The turbidity of the water is the main factor responsible for its bright coloured scales. It is aggressive in nature and very defensive of its habitat.

The young arowana is characterised by a straight horizontal back that arches as it grows. The depth of the body ranges from 10–14 cm. Scales are coarse and big. The pelvic and anal fins have the same length. Caudal fins have two shapes - Pear and Fan;



three back fins (tail, anal, dorsal) are not joined. Its mouth is extremely big and slanting, and forms into a rectangular shape when open. A pair of mandibular barbels grows out of the tip of its lower mouth. The slit extends beyond its big eyes; its teeth are tiny, closely packed and sharp. This fish can grow up to 30 inches, and weigh about 7 kilos in an aquarium.

Its breeding behaviour is not easy. The female lays its eggs on the surface of the water (epilimnion). As the eggs sink into the water, the male fish catches the eggs before they reach the bottom. The eggs remain inside the mouth of the male fish until they are hatched. Normally, the male fish's duty is to protect the 'babies' in its mouth but when the number gets too big, the female helps.

**Status: Endangered and protected under CITES**

– The Research Branch, ARCBC

