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Amazon Species Watch Arowana

Scientific Classification

Kingdom:	Animalia
Phylum:	Chordata
Class:	Actinopterygii
Order:	Osteoglossiformes
Sub Order:	Osteoglossoidei
Genus:	Osteoglossum
Species:	O.bicirrhosum

The Arowana, or as it is sometimes called, the 'Monkey Fish' is one of the most acrobatic performers within the Amazon. With a penchant for leaping out of the water to take insects and small animals from the overhead vegetation, and also for being able to swim backwards, these truly are an incredible species. Arowanas are native to the Amazon drainage system and the western Orinoco, Rupununi and Essequibo systems of the Guianas. They live in both the whitewater and blackwater floodplains of the Amazon. In both types of water, they are most abundant in the flooded areas. This fish has relatively large scales, a long body, and a tapered tail, with the dorsal and anal fins extending all the way to the small caudal fin, with which they are nearly fused. Its maximum total length is typically considered to be 0.9 m (3.0 ft), but there are reports of individuals up to 1.2 m (3.9 ft).



Arowanas are freshwater bony fish of the family Osteoglossidae, also known as 'bony tongues' (the latter name is now often reserved for Arapaimidae). In this family of fish, the head is bony, and the elongated body is covered by large, heavy scales, with a mosaic pattern of canals. The name "bony tongues" is derived from a toothed bone on the floor of the mouth, the "tongue", equipped with teeth that bite against teeth on the roof of the mouth. The arowana is a facultative air breather and can obtain oxygen from air by sucking it into its swim bladder, which is lined with capillaries like lung tissue. Arowanas are really distinctive with two prominent barbels at the extremity of their lower jaw.



Arowana usually swim near the water surface waiting for potential prey. Although specimens have been found with the remains of birds, bats, mice, and snakes in their stomachs, its main diet consists of crustaceans, insects, smaller fish, and other animals that float on the water surface, which its drawbridge-like mouth is exclusively adapted for feeding on. Arowanas are omnivorous, with a tendency to feed on fish at the surface. The superior position of the mouth allows them to capture their prey while swimming from below. They have a unique predatory behaviour in that they usually stay parallel to a downed tree to hide before attacking prey, which usually involves jumping out of the water. They can catch large insects, other fish, crabs, snails, snakes, and small birds in low hanging branches. These fish hit topwater lures with abandon and can also be caught on flies, jigs, and subsurface minnow baits. Once hooked, that's when the acrobatics start, and they provide incredible sport on light tackle.

