

Identification Notes for wildlife law enforcement

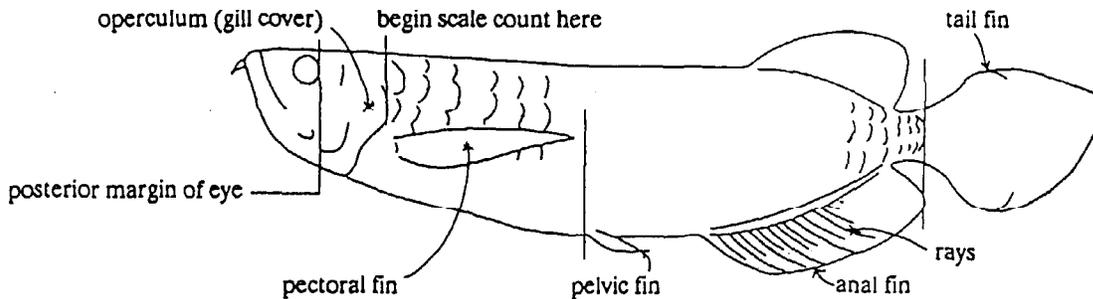
CATEGORY: FISH

(Mammal, Bird, Reptile, Fish, Invertebrate, Other)

Scientific name: Scleropages formosus

Common Names: dragon fish
arowana
bony tongue

PROBLEM: The endangered (ESA) freshwater "dragon fish" (*S. formosus*) currently being smuggled into U.S. ports may be confused with two similar species (*S. jardini* and *S. leichardti*) which are not endangered. Chin barbels, found on all 3 species, often break off or are missing. The following key and illustration point out characteristics. *S. formosus* may be any size up to 10" + and may be red, gold, silver, black or green. Large specimens are worth a few thousand dollars.



KEY TO *SCLEROPAGES* SPECIES

- 1a. Lateral scales fewer than 30.....*formosus*
1b. Lateral scales more than 30.....go to 2a

When counting lateral scales, begin counting at a point parallel to the rear edge of the operculum (or gill cover) and end at the base of the tail fin (be sure to count the very small scales near the base of the tail).

- 2a. Mouth opening not extending beyond the posterior margin of the eye. Fewer than 30 anal fin rays. Distal tip of pectoral fin reaches base of pelvic fin. Only 1 - 2 large orange or red spots per upper side scales.....*leichardti*
2b. Mouth opening extending beyond the posterior margin of the eye. 30 anal fin rays. Distal tip of pectoral fin does not reach base of pelvic fin. Three or four orange or red spots per upper side scales forming a crescent-like pattern.....*jardini*

Since S. leichardti and S. jardini are not considered endangered, counting the lateral scales may be the only step necessary.

WATCH FOR: *S. formosus* may be found in shipments of goldfish or other freshwater aquarium fish; or in personal luggage, in bottles or in plastic bags completely lined with newspapers.

FROM: *S. formosus* is from Thailand, SE Asia, and Indonesia. *S. leichardti* is from N. Australia. *S. jardini* is from N. Australia and New Guinea. They may be exported from Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and SE Asia with copies of Australian export permits.

OTHER: This aggressive fish is transported either singly or in large numbers (+30).

- REFERENCES:** Allen, J. & Boeseman, M. 1982. Collection of Freshwater Fishes.... Records of the Western Australia Museum. 10(2): 67-103
Eschmeyer, W.N. 1990. Catalog of the Genera of Recent Fishes. Scientific Pub. of the California Academy of Sciences, S.F.
Roberts, Tyson 1989. Fishes of Borneo. Scientific Pub. of the California Academy of Sciences, S.F.
USFWS. Endangered Species Law Enforcement Identification Manual.