

# Australian Lungfish

*Neoceratodus forsteri*



## Introduction

The Australian Lungfish belongs to an ancient group of fish, the fleshy finned fish (*Ceratidae*). Fossils identical to *N forsteri* found in NSW have been dated back to 100 million years ago during the Cretaceous Period. *N forsteri* is one of only six living species of the Lungfish family; the others exist in Africa and South America. The Australian form can be easily differentiated from the others as it most closely resembles the fossilised lungfish which are more solid and have larger fins and scales; they only have a single lung as opposed to all the other species having a pair. The lung enables them to extract oxygen from the atmosphere when the water becomes stagnant and low in dissolved oxygen during the dry season or times of drought.

## Description

Lungfish are easily identified by their long heavy body, murky green/brown back and sides which changes to an orange/pink belly. They have large heavy overlapping scales, small eyes and sturdy pectoral and pelvic fins that resemble flippers. Wild specimens have been known to grow to 1.5m in length and can have a lifespan of 100 years.

## Distribution

Australian Lungfish are found in the Burnett and Mary River systems in South-East Queensland and has been introduced into other adjacent systems such as the Brisbane, Albert, Coomera, Pine and Stanley rivers as well as Enoggera Reservoir. Recent studies have shown that the lungfish are thriving in these natural and translocated areas.

## Habitat

The natural habitat is usually deep pools with still or slow moving water with vegetation covering the river banks, the water may be clear or turbid and the substrate below is generally mud, sand or gravel.

## Aquarium Care

Lungfish are easy to care for and are undemanding regarding tank conditions and feeding. In the wild they have no natural predators so they tend to swim in a slow laconic manner. Suitable water parameters are: temperature 10°C - 29°C, pH 6 - 8, general hardness 200 - 400ppm, they have been hatched and raised in water at 25 °C - 26 °C with a pH of 7 and general hardness of 300ppm. As they can grow very large the minimum aquarium size should be 6 foot. They are slow growing and will reach a size of 18 inches to 2 feet at 3 - 5 years of age under. They can be kept in a community tank as they are not aggressive towards other fish but will eat anything that they can fit in their mouth. Juveniles are also known to nip at each others pectoral fins if they are crowded together. It is important to cover the tank with a tight fitting lid to prevent them jumping out of the aquarium. Lungfish can also be trained to be handled out of water (as long as your hands are wet) and can be stroked and patted once they have formed a bond with their owner.

## Feeding

Lungfish will accept live food (freshwater shrimp, snails and worms), frozen food (fish fillets, freshwater mussel meat and beefheart with the fat and gristle removed), it is a good idea to mince the frozen ingredients together, add dry pellets and then freeze in meal sized portions. They will also take the occasional algae wafer.

## Legislation

The Australian Lungfish is classified as being endangered, and is listed in Appendix 2 of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Lungfish purchased from Aquarium Industries have been sourced from a supplier that is CITES approved for breeding lungfish, the broodstock has been obtained under the supervision of DPI fisheries and the progeny are grown to a certain size (around 14cm) suitable for keeping in an aquarium. All of the lungfish are microchipped, DNA tested and accompanied with a permit for identification purposes.

care sheet



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