

Freshwater Angelfish

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Actinopterygii
Order: Perciformes
Family: Cichlidae
Genus: *Pterophyllum*
Species: *scalare*



Photo courtesy of Karen Marzynski

Habitat

- **In the Wild:** The freshwater angelfish is found in the central Amazon River of Brazil and tributaries into Peru, Colombia, Guyana, French Guiana and eastern Ecuador. They inhabit swamps or flooded grounds where the aquatic vegetations are dense and the water is either clear or silty.
- **Exhibit Location:** Administration Office Aquarium

Characteristics

- The adult has a length up to 6 inches.
- The freshwater angelfish colors may be gold, silver, black or marbled. The most common coloring of the wild species is silver with dark vertical bars. Juveniles have 7 bars. Adults have 4 bars.
- The body is compressed and disc-shaped. The dorsal (top) and anal (bottom) spiny rays increase in length from anterior (front) to posterior (back) part of the fin.
- **Lifespan:** **In the Wild** Unknown; **In Captivity** 10 or more years

Behaviors

- Once they pair up, they can become territorial.
- During the entire brooding cycle, bonding of the original pair of parents is maintained complete with defense of each partner against aggression or potential rivals.
- **Enrichments at the Zoo:** varying foods, visitors

Reproduction

- *Pterophyllum scalare* reaches sexual maturity at about 10 months of age.
- Sexing is difficult. Males have pointed, short, breeding tubes that extend from the vent. The females' are rounded and short.
- Courtship works both ways. The male chooses his mate, or the female chooses her mate. In either case, the pair selects a territory and protects it against all intruders.
- Being egg-depositors, the eggs are laid on plants or rocks. Females can deposit up to 500 eggs with each spawning. Eggs are usually clear, small (0.06 - 0.12 inches) and round. They hatch within 48 hours.
- Egg size depends on the availability and quality of food eaten by the parents. Infertile eggs turn white and are removed by the parents.
- Freshwater angelfish exhibit parental spawning. Both parents guard and provide care to the eggs and the newly hatched fry (young) until they are old enough to care for themselves.

Diet

- **In the Wild:** aquatic insects, benthic crustaceans, shrimp, prawns
- **At the Zoo:** brine shrimp, smelt, gelatin, mosquito larvae

Conservation Status

- **IUCN Status:** Not listed **Cites Appendix:** Not listed
- They are not endangered. They are hunted because of their popularity as aquarium fishes.
- Predators: larger fish, humans

Did You Know?/Fun Facts

- *Pterophyllum* means winged leaf. *Scalare* means like a flight of stairs, in reference to the dorsal fin.
- The freshwater angelfish is one of the most popular of all tropical aquarium fish because of their mild temperament and ease of breeding in captivity.
- This was also one of the first of the New World Cichlids brought into the United States.
- They have been called the “kings of the aquarium.”

Sources:

- Axelrod, H.R. (1993). *Pterophyllum scalare* freshwater angelfish. Retrieved October 7, 2006, from FishBase Web site:
<http://www.fishbase.org/Summary/speciesSummary.php?ID=4717&genusname+Pterophyllum&speciesname=scalare>
- Sandford, Gina (1999). *Aquarium owner's guide: the complete illustrated guide to the home aquarium*. New York, New York: DK Publishing, Inc.
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- Swann, LaDon (1994, May). Reproduction of angelfish (*pterphyllum scalare*). Retrieved October 24, 2006, from Aquaculture Extension Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant Program Web site:
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