

YZC Animal of the Month, November 2011

Australian Lungfish (*Neoceratodus forsteri*)



This month's animal is quite an unusual one. It can be found in the fish displays of the upper gallery.

The Sarcopterygii, or Lobe-Fins, are bony vertebrates – that is animals with backbones and a bony skeleton inside their body. If you look inside the paired fins (they're the two sets of fins on the sides of the body rather than those running down the midline) they have just a single bone meeting the shoulder in the front pair, and a single bone meeting the hip in the back ones. You might have guessed it from this that we are lobe-finned vertebrates as well.

All backboned animals with arms and legs are Lobe-Fins, but most fish today (animals with fins not limbs) are Ray-Fin Vertebrates – a huge group which we'll look at some and other time. However, there

two types of Lobe-Fin fish alive today – Coelacanths and Lungfish. There is only one type of Coelacanth (*Latimeria*), but there are three types of lungfish: *Protopterus* from Africa; *Lepidosiren* from South America; and *Neoceratodus* from Australia.

The Australian Lungfish is the most fishy of the living Lungfish. It has fins that look like fins rather than the odd whip-like things in the African South American Lungfish. It also can survive without air (the African and South American Lungfish drown if they can't get to air).

The Australian Lungfish is threatened. It lives in only a few rivers in Australia. The environments they live in, particularly where they spawn, are decreasing, and numbers of fish are going down with it.