

WHO IS THIS?

Coelacanthiformes (*coelacanthiformes*), or **celacants**, are an order of fish whose body is covered with bony scales. They belong to one of the oldest evolutionary orders of bony fish, that of the **crossopterygians**.

They are known for their bright blue pigmentation.

Only two living species of coelacanth are known:

Latimeria chalumnae of the Comoros Islands (East Africa);

Latimeria menadoensi (Indonesia).

They move in small schools. On average they reach a weight of 80 kg, and a length of 2 m and have a life expectancy of about 60 years. Their eyes are extremely sensitive to light. Their brain occupies only 1.5% of the cranial cavity, while the rest is fat.

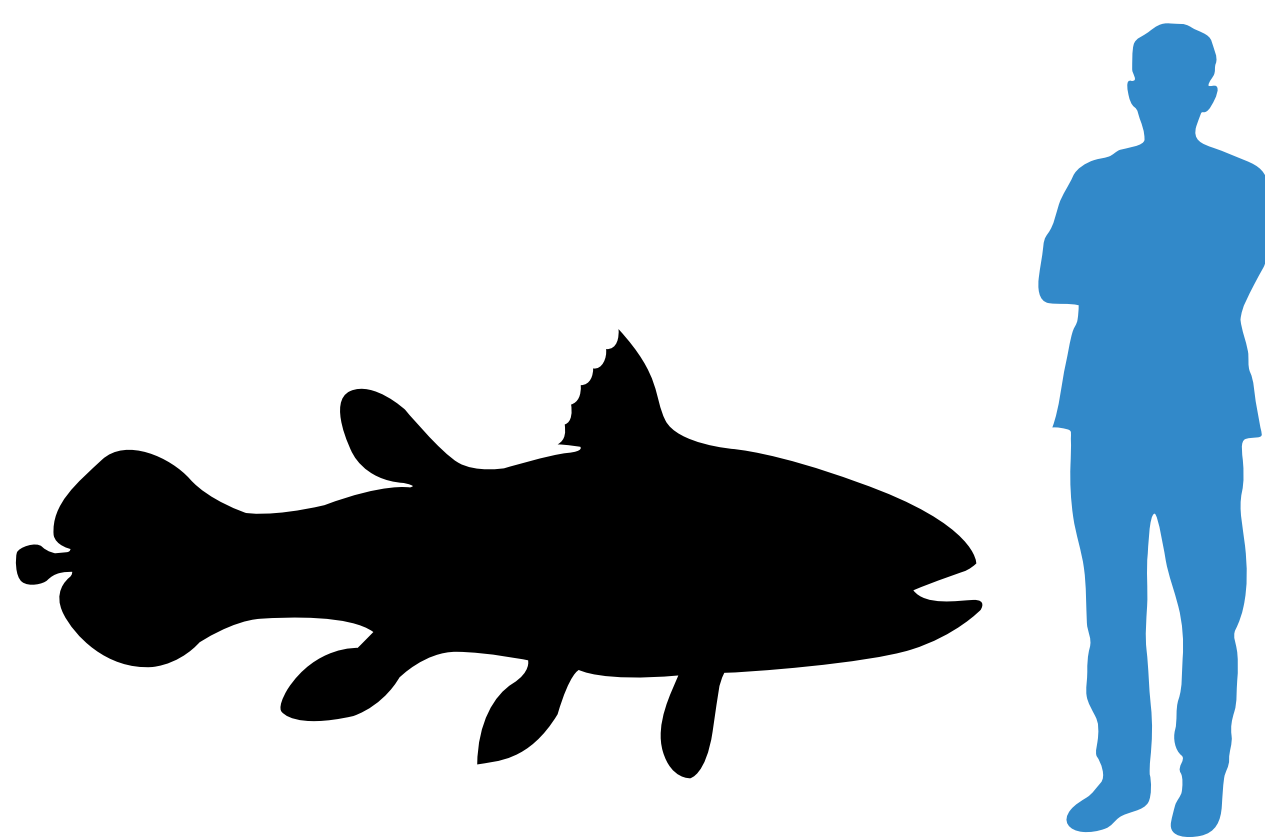
WHY IS IT CALLED “LIVING FOSSIL”?

Since the early 900's, the coelacanth was believed to be extinct along with dinosaurs, 65 million years ago, at the end of the Cretaceous era.

However in 1938, the curator of the Natural History Museum of East London (South Africa) noticed the strange animal on a fishmonger's counter and since then the coelacanth has been called the “living fossil”.

WHY DID THEY THINK IT WAS EXTINCT?

After the end of the Cretaceous era, in the fossil records so far found, all traces of coelacanth disappeared. The presumed reason to explain this strange disappearance is probably because the coelacanth abandoned the shallow waters and moved to deeper ones.



Did you know?

What are the intracranial joint and the rostral organ?

These are the only fish that have the intracranial joint: it allows them to internally separate the upper half of the skull from the lower, and to widen their mouth so as to swallow a large prey. Moreover, they have an electro-receptive apparatus (rostral organ) that probably serves to identify their prey.