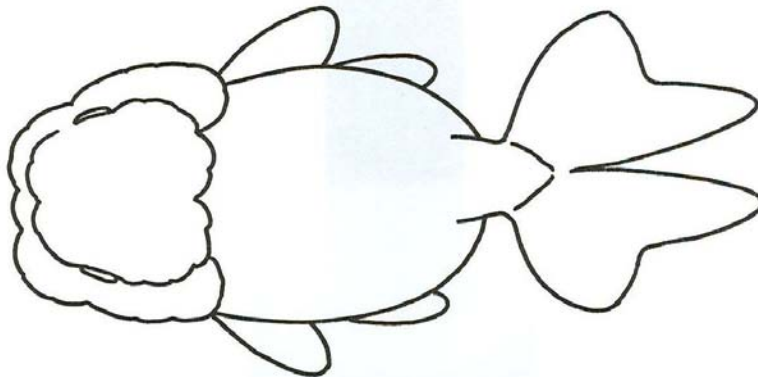
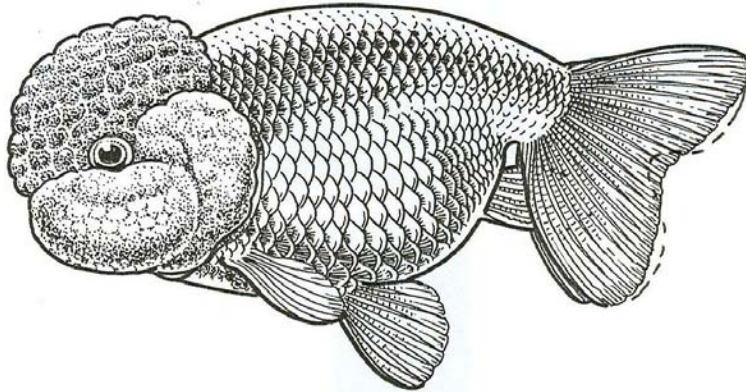


## Goldfish Varieties – Lionhead By Peter J. Ponzio

In the original article for this series, we defined a number of characteristics common to all goldfish, and introduced the concept of goldfish varieties, or different types of goldfish. Each subsequent article would provide detailed guidelines to appreciate and understand the characteristics of each variety recognized by the Goldfish Society of America (GFSA). Line Art for the GFSA standards has been provided courtesy of Merlin Cunliffe.

The Lionhead was the first dorsal-less fish produced with headgrowth. The fish was probably derived from an egg-fish that, through mutation, developed a wen, or growth on the head. Through successive breeding, the head growth was emphasized, and subtle changes to the basic egg-fish body shape were introduced.

The line art drawing, supplied by Merlin Cunliffe, shows the body shape of the Lionhead, which will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.



The most striking characteristic of the Lionhead is the prominent headgrowth, which can be divided into three areas: cranial growth, cheek growth and opercular, or gill growth. Cranial growth refers to the development of the wen over the top of the fish's head area. Cheek growth refers to the placement of the wen over the region surrounding the eye and extending into the cheek and frontal areas of the face. Opercular growth refers to the area covering the gill plates of the fish. In the Lionhead, all three areas should be fully developed, and growth in one area should not predominate over the other areas. The overall effect of the headgrowth should be balanced, so that the fish appears to have a rounded appearance, as shown in the line drawing.

The back profile of the fish should be almost flat, with a gentle slope towards the caudal peduncle, where the tail joins the body. There should be no trace of a vestigial dorsal spine, nor should there be any hint of an indentation where the dorsal fin would normally meet the body. When viewed from the top, the caudal peduncle appears to narrow where it joins the body and tail, but the fish should not show signs of a pinch near the peduncle region. In some fish, the caudal peduncle appears to be rather long, which gives the fish an unbalanced look.

Finnage is paired for the pectorals, ventrals and anal fins, and the tail should show a fork. The amount of forking permitted in the tail is from twenty-five to seventy-five percent, but this should be evaluated by eye-site, and not by a strict attempt at measurement. The degree of forking in the tail will determine the fish's swimming motion. If the tail is forked at less than twenty-five percent, the fish will collapse its tail and swim with a lurching motion from side-to-side. If the tail is forked by more than seventy-five percent, the tail will spread out too greatly, causing the fish to sink while swimming. A tail split of approximately fifty percent seems to produce the best swimming motion for the fish. Please note that the finnage for the Lionhead is much shorter than that of the egg-fish, from which it was developed.

The body shape of the fish should appear slightly rectangular, and not elongated. In the nineteen sixties and seventies, Lionheads were imported into the U.S. with long body shapes (these were inferior quality fish), which led people to believe that a long body shape was characteristic of Lionheads. Recently, better quality fish have been imported, and these fish possess more compact body shapes than were seen in the late twentieth century.



**Note the full headgrowth, but slightly long caudal peduncle seen on this fish, photo courtesy of Chinese Goldfish**

The Lionhead is theoretically available in all colors seen in goldfish, although calico varieties are very rare. In practice, most Lionheads are red, red and white, and black with other colors being uncommon. Lionheads can grow to lengths of eight to ten inches, although they are generally seen in the five to six inch size for mature specimens. Lionheads are large fish, however, and require extensive biological filtration due to their body mass. In addition, Lionheads require extra aeration due to the large headgrowth in the check area; failure to provide adequate aeration can result in harm to the fish. In China, Lionheads are raised in shallow ponds (approximately eight to ten inches in depth) that are quite long.

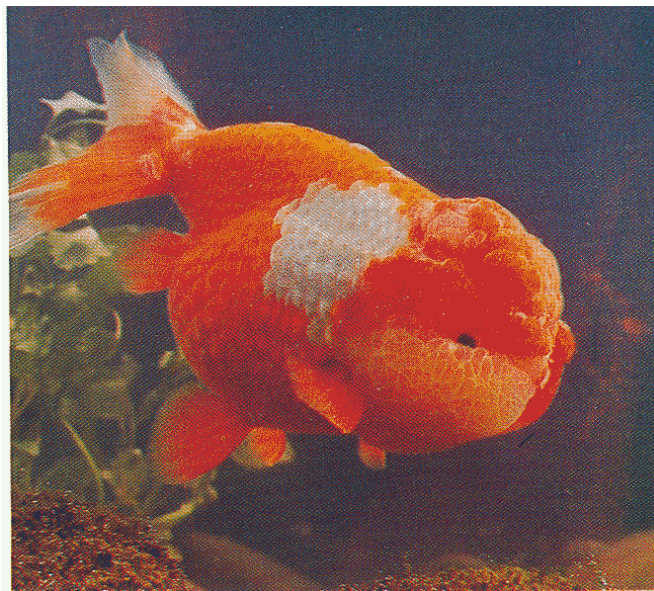
Despite their unorthodox appearance, Lionheads are hardy fish, and can be raised outdoors in the summer months; they should be brought indoors and placed in aquaria during the winter months. Lionheads require a diet higher in protein than most goldfish in order to produce well-balanced headgrowth (this trait is shared by Orandas and Ranchus due to their headgrowth), and live foods should be added as supplements to their diet. A diet of forty to fifty percent protein is recommended, and sinking food – not floating- should be fed to these fish in order to minimize swim bladder problems.

When judging Lionheads, preference is given to fish with full hood development, and a slight downward curving back profile. The AGA is encouraging judges to view Lionheads from the side as well as from the top, although the top profile of the fish is not as interesting as that of the Ranchu. Judging from the top will also reveal the presence of an elongated caudal

peduncle, which will detract from the merits of a fish. Lionheads often compete in the same category as Ranchus in most fish shows, and will usually not fare as well as Ranchus in competitions. With the importation of better specimens of Lionheads, this imbalance will likely be corrected.



**Red and black Lionhead, photo courtesy of Goldfish in Hong Kong;  
notice the sloping back profile and shortened caudal peduncle**



**Red & White Lionhead, from Chinese Goldfish**

Recently, Lionheads have been crossed with Japanese Ranchu to produce a fish with the back profile of a Ranchu, with the hood growth of a Lionhead. These fish are not a recognized breed, but have been winning major awards at competitions in the United States. The term "Lionchu" has been coined to describe these fish, and they are becoming more popular at fish shows across the country.



**Pictured above is a "Lionchu" which combines the back profile of a Ranchu with the headgrowth of a Lionhead**



**Baby Lionhead (under one year old) showing hood development**

The Lionhead is enjoying a resurgence of popularity in this country, due, in part, to the importation of a better quality of fish. The unique features of the Lionhead, combined with its engaging personality and hardy nature, make this fish a welcome addition to goldfish keeping.