Superclass ACTINOPTERYGII Ray-finned Fishes
actino-, ray; pteron, fin or wing, i.e., fishes with fins of webbed skin supported by bony or horny spines (“rays”), as opposed to the fleshy, lobed fins that characterize Superclass Sarcopterygii

Class CLADISTIA
etymology not explained, perhaps clado, branch; -ista, a signifying agent, i.e., “one that branches,” possibly referring to basally branching rays of polypterids (bichirs)

Order POLYPTERIFORMES

Family POLYPTERIDAE Bichirs

2 genera · 14 species

*Erpetoichthys* Smith 1865
presumably a misspelling or variant spelling of *herpes*, snake, referring to “serpent-like aspect”; *ichthys*, fish [mistakenly believing “Erpetoichthys” was preoccupied, Smith proposed an unnecessary replacement name in 1866: *Calamoichthys* (*calamus*, reed; *ichthys*, fish, referring to its “cylindrical character”); some scholars believe that due to the vagaries of journal publishing in the 1800s, *Calamoichthys* inadvertently predates *Erpetoichthys* (with date changed to 1868) and should be the valid name of the genus]

*Erpetoichthys calabaricus* Smith 1865
-icus, belonging to: Old Calabar River, West Africa, type locality

*Polypterus* Lacepède 1803
poly, many; pteron, fin, referring to multiple dorsal finlets instead of single dorsal fin

*Polypterus ansorgii* Boulenger 1910
in honor of explorer William John Ansorge (1850-1913), who collected type

*Polypterus bichir* Lacepède 1803
local Arabic name for this fish along the Nile River in Egypt

*Polypterus congicus* Boulenger 1898
-icus, belonging to: the Congo Basin (Stanley Falls), type locality

*Polypterus delhezi* Boulenger 1899
in honor of Belgian artist and naturalist Henri Paul Delhez (1870-1900), who collected type and provided life-history notes on bichirs based on interviews with locals; his collections and field observations were useful in the preparation of Boulenger’s book on Congo fishes

*Polypterus endlicheri* Heckel 1847
in honor of botanist Stephan Endlicher (1804-1849), who apparently discovered the species in the fish collection at the Naturhistorisches Museum (Vienna)

*Polypterus mokelembembe* Schliewen & Schäfer 2006
Mokele-mbembe, a mythological creature believed by some to be a sauropod dinosaur that survived the extinction of dinosaurs in the central Congo basin, alluding to the archaic nature of polypteriforms, which most likely are the sister group to the remaining Actinopterygii, and which probably existed at the same time as sauropods

*Polypterus ornatipinnis* Boulenger 1902
ornatus, decorated; pinnis, fin, referring to black spots on dorsal fin and black bars on pectoral, ventral, anal and caudal fins

*Polypterus palmas* Ayres 1850
referring to Cape Palmas, Liberia, type locality

*Polypterus polli* Gosse 1988
in honor of Belgian ichthyologist Max Poll (1908-1991), who proposed a name for this bichir in 1954 (*P. palmas congicus*, preoccupied by *P. congicus* Boulenger 1898) but did not describe it

*Polypterus retropinnis* Vaillant 1899
retro, back; pinnis, fin, referring to origin of dorsal fin behind the middle of the body

*Polypterus senegalus* Cuvier 1829
Senegalese (described from Senegal)
**Polypterus teugelsi** Britz 2004
in honor of the late Guy Teugels (1954-2003), curator of fishes at the Musée Royale de l’Afrique Centrale, for his “myriad influential contributions to the systematics of African freshwater fishes”

**Polypterus weeksii** Boulenger 1898
in honor of John Henry Weeks (1861-1924), Baptist missionary, ethnographer, explorer and diarist, who collected type at his mission station in Monsembe, upper Congo River, Zaire (now Democratic Republic of the Congo)