

AQUARIUM
FISHES FROM OUR OWN COUNTRY
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The ardent fish fancier whose interest center in those aquarium fishes which have been somewhat hastily and incorrectly termed "tropical", finds in these sad days, while cruel war holds Europe in its pitiless grip, that the men and the ships upon whom the fish importer depended for his regular supplies of fishes, are tied up in their home ports, interned, or lie beneath the waters. The fishes may be gliding gracefully over the remains—silent guardians of those who devoted so much thought and attention to them in life.

Let us banish these gloomy, painful thoughts and see if the war can deprive us of all the beautiful creatures that afford us so much pleasure. Glancing covetously through the long list of finny treasures known to aquarists, we see many species with which we are familiar. Some from the far-off East, from remote Africa, and from Central and South America, and still others from—where? Why from our own country, of course! The land of Agassiz, Audubon, Evermann, Jordan, and many other famous naturalists, ichthyologists and aquarists.

How many really desirable species are natives of North America? Among the viviparous (live-bearing) kinds we have that darling of the older fanciers, *Gambusia affinis holbrooki*,—the little "harlequin" of the finny tribe. The male, a scant inch in length, is blotched and spotted with velvety black on a bluish or yellowish-white background. His mate, inconspicuous but larger, sports a russet-brown "costume" with a gleam of white below. If in "an interesting condition," a black blotch on the abdomen indicates the presence of unborn progeny. Most males in the wild state are brown like the female and are then known as *G. affinis*. This species, as also the next two, gives birth to its young alive, and does not "lay" eggs like the majority of fishes. The little fellows, if not devoured by the parents or other fishes, soon swim about and search for microscopic live food. *Gambusia affinis* is a native of the South and Southeastern United States, and has been collected as far north as Southern Illinois.

A larger fish, and one quite different in appearance, is *Mollienisia latipinna*. The specific name "latipinna" means "with a broad fin" and refers to the wide and long dorsal of the male. The back is grayish-brown; sides bluish-pearl with several rows of black dots or dashes; under parts white. The dorsal and caudal of the male are richly spotted with orange and have steel-blue borders. As is usual with live-bearers, the females are larger than the males, and attain a length of three inches—the males, two inches. This fish thrives best in brackish (salty) water, though it has been kept and bred in absolutely freshwater aquaria. Another species, *M. velifera*, has an exceptionally large dorsal fin, and is perhaps better considered a variety of the former, which it otherwise resembles. Both these fishes are natives of Louisiana and Florida. *M. latipinna* is abundant about New Orleans.

Heterandria formose, or as it is sometimes called, *Girardinus formosus*, is the smallest of all live-bearing fishes. The males are often mature when less than one-half inch in length. The sexes are alike in coloration, but differ in shape. The female is naturally more plump and round. In color the back is warm chestnut, and the abdomen is white. There is a black and red spot on the dorsal and a horizontal black stripe on the sides, with indistinct black cross-bars. This species about concludes the assortment of live-bearers indigenous to the United States in fresh water.

In the Sunfish and Bass group (a family peculiar to North America), we find some very desirable aquarium fishes, including the Black-banded Sunfish, *Mesogonistea chaetodon*. This species ranges from New Jersey to North Carolina. The Diamond Bass, *Enneacanthus gloriosus*, is represented in my collection by beautiful specimens from North Carolina. The Orange-spotted Sunfish, *Lepomis humilis*, a native of the Mississippi Valley, is particularly attractive and desirable. Medium-sized Peacock-eye Bass, *Contrarchus macropterus*, from Virginia and Florida, and the Calico Bass, are hardy in domesticity. The Pygmy Sunfish, *Epiplatys zonatum*,

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from North Carolina, is one of the smallest, if not the smallest of all sunfishes, and has only recently been studied in aquaria. The males are from one-half to three-quarters of an inch long, blackish with vertical rows of silver scales. The spotted dorsal fin suggests *Mollienisia*. The females are smaller and pinkish-brown in color. All the Sunfishes and Basses make nests in the sand and guard the eggs and young.

A desirable and beautiful genus of aquarium fishes occurring in North America (also in Europe, Africa, and Asia) is *Fundulus* (the killifishes). In this country we have the gold and red-spotted *F. chrysotus*, *F. dispar*, *F. Diaphanus*, *F. memona*, *F. nottii* (the Starhead), *F. heteroclitus* and a few others. These are mostly quiet fishes that prefer to lie still near the surface. They spawn on semi-floating clumps of plants.

Worthy of the aquarist's attention is the Dace family, which includes the Red-bellied Dace, Black-nosed Dace, Crimson-striped Dace, Rosy-sided Dace, the Golden Dace and the Copper-striped Dace. The Darters are very interesting, and some of them exceedingly beautiful, such as the Rainbow Darter, *Etheostoma coeruleum*, the Green-sided Darter, *Diplesion blenniodes*, the Fan-tailed Darter, *Etheostoma fiabellare*, and some others.

Many of the fishes mentioned have not yet been introduced into Germany, where there are plenty of fanciers who will pay good prices for them. Importers, before the war, would not pay enough to justify any special effort being made to catch and export them, so there is little danger of our streams being depleted.

It can be readily seen that if we Americans were to confine ourselves to the study and culture of native fishes, we would have available enough material to entitle us to the rank of first-class aquarists, were we to pursue our investigations into their life-histories as deeply as we do into those of the Asiatic, African and South American species.

Note from the Review Editor

As all of you alert readers realize, the foregoing article should be wearing a long beard. It first appeared 58 years ago in *Aquatic Life* magazine. The hostilities have changed their location and fish imports are threatened from a different quarter, but the native fish situation is largely unchanged. While fish from North America are highly prized by fish keepers on other continents, they are looked upon with disdain by the majority of American aquarists.

NANFA is the first real attempt to bring our natives into the limelight. Be proud! Round up some converts! Go down to the next local aquarium society meeting and wave the native American flag.



Lucania goodei