

The “Asiatic Fire Barb” aka *Cyprinella lutrensis*

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by

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Imagine a purple and rosy red fish. Then imagine 20 of these 2-3 inch beauties parading through your 45 gallon aquarium. Add to that, they like the hard, alkaline concrete that passes for tap water in many parts of this country, and are not fussy when it comes to grubbing. Sound interesting?

My first encounter with the “Asiatic Fire Barb” occurred sometime before 1975. I say “Asiatic Fire Barb” because that’s how the aquarium store had them labeled. The owner had ordered them from a wholesaler and didn’t know a thing about them.

Turning to one of my reliable sources of information, I cornered Al Castro at a Bay Area Killifish meeting and described the fish in question. Al laughed. He told me the fish was *not* from Asia and was *not* a barb. It was actually *Notropis lutrensis* (now *Cyprinella lutrensis*), the red shiner, a native of the Mississippi River basin.

In a way the red shiner (and most natives) is like the old prophet—without honor in his own land. For some reason, the average fish hobbyist wants foreign

fish, so the “Asiatic Fire Barb” was created to help sell a common minnow.

My second encounter took place in the wilds of Arizona. My very pregnant wife and I were visiting her father in Punkin Center (try finding it on a map!) in July. An understatement is that Arizona tends to get hot in the summer. One way we found relief from the heat was wading or laying down in the cool waters of the local stream. Unfortunately, there were some pesky little critters that kept nibbling on the exposed parts of our bodies. Granted, they didn’t have the dentition of a piranha, but they were annoying. My curiosity finally compelled me to find out what found us so delicious. Well, you guessed it—red shiners. I’m not sure how they made it over the Continental Divide, but there they were.

My third encounter was even more surprising. Several years ago, while Ray Katula was living in Modesto, California, he organized some collecting trips for native fish enthusiasts under the auspices of the University of California at Davis. On one trip we

seined the San Joaquin River near Patterson. Again, red shiners. I'm beginning to think these fish travel faster than the med-fly or African bees!

Giving in to their beauty, I decided to keep a few and try to breed them. I set them up in a bare 22 gallon breeder tank with an outside power filter and a floating spawning mop. You won't believe all of the eggs they lay! I got so tired of picking them off the spawning mops that I finally just moved the mops to hatching containers (pickle jars), throwing a fresh map in with the spawners. I added a touch of acriflavine and a gently bubbling airstone to the jars and ended up with large hatches.

The newly hatched fry were small and I should have started them with infusoria. Since I didn't have any I used newly hatched brine shrimp and finely ground flake food. I also added some ramshorn snails to eat the excess food and help create infusoria. Despite this less than perfect start, many of the fry got past this initial stage. After that, raising them

was easy. By the third generation, my interest in breeding the red shiner was waning. I also wanted the room for other species. I moved them to a larger outdoor tank and stopped collecting eggs. In the relatively confined space of the tank, the adults consumed either the eggs or the fry and there was no fourth generation.

Should you keep the "Asiatic Fire Barb"? There is no question that the red shiner is an easy and active species that will add color to your aquarium. If they don't appeal to you as a display fish, there is another reason you might want to keep and breed them. For those of you devoted to ravenous predatory fish, thus might be your answer to a relatively cheap source of food, or at least part of it. So try the red shiner. You might like them. If you don't, your other fish will.

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