

## THE BEGINNER'S BUCKET

Auction *Ameca* Collecting

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**I**n the fall and winter months, when it's getting just a little too cold to plan collecting trips, I often collect at the auctions held at my local aquarium club, the Potomac Valley Aquarium Society (PVAS). These auctions give me the chance to acquire native fishes from faraway places that I wouldn't ordinarily get to visit. One fascinating native is the Mexican goodeid, *Ameca splendens*.

Now I know what many of you native fish enthusiasts are thinking: "What are you trying to pull, Bob? *Ameca splendens* is not a native—it's from México."

We native fish addicts tend to be reverse fish snobs. If it doesn't come from our backyards, we don't want it. Keep your colorful store-bought cichlids—just give me my blacknose dace. But with that attitude, we can deprive ourselves of the chance to learn about many of the continent's fascinating species. And depending on how you define North America, the continent stretches far south of the Rio Grande, to include all—or a great part of—the country of México. Like the waters of the U.S., México's waters include a diverse array of fascinating species good for aquarium observation and study.

*Ameca splendens* is one such species. Like guppies and mollies, *Ameca splendens* are sexually dimorphic. Females, overall, are variegated—faint gray, covered by blotches of black lines. Males (Fig. 1) are much more colorful, with iridescent green flanks. There is also a black band on the inner part of the tail fin, closest to the body, and a bright yellow band on the edge of the tail fin. These striking colors have earned *Ameca splendens* the common name of butterfly goodeid.

According to the American Livebearer Association's anthology, *Goodeids*, this group of livebearing fishes is native to west-central México. The various goodeid species populate a variety of habitats, from shallow riffles to deep pools. Similarly, they possess a number of feeding strategies, from carnivores, to omnivores, to almost complete herbivory.

Instead of a gonopodium, like other livebearers, male goodeids have the first six or seven rays of the anal fin crowded together, separated from the remaining rays by a small notch.



Fig. 1.

Butterfly goodeid, *Ameca splendens*, male, with its distinctive caudal fin bands. Photograph by Dr. Joanne Norton.  
© American Livebearers Association.

Developing fry receive nutrients via a placenta-like organ, the trophotaeniae. Specifically, *Ameca splendens* is native to the Río Ameca system, which begins just west of Guadalajara, and ultimately drains into the Pacific.

Because of the higher altitudes of west-central México, *Ameca splendens* (and most goodeids) can tolerate cooler temperatures—into the high 50s and low 60s. *Ameca* have the longer intestinal tracts common to fish that consume a lot of plant matter, but will happily accept all kinds of live, frozen, and prepared foods. Mine thrived on the Southern States Bass Pellets that I feed almost all of my fish. (I soak pellet foods for an hour or so before feeding. Dry foods can kill fish by taking on water and expanding in the digestive tract.) The *Ameca* I kept also cleaned out hair algae that had overtaken one of my tanks. Mine did equally well in hard, alkaline water with a half-teaspoon of marine salt per gallon, or in moderately hard tap water with a pH of about 7.6.

These fish grow large for livebearers, sometimes reaching four inches. Adults usually don't bother the newborn fry, which are too large for them to eat. Like many goodeids, *Ameca splendens* are a little on the aggressive side. Goodeid species will also hybridize with each other, so it's a good idea to keep only one species per tank, or with a tough native killifish like the mummichog (*Fundulus heteroclitus*). 