

The Central Longear (*Lepomis Megalotis*) As An Aquarium Species

By
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With the increased interest in Natives over the past decade a great many of our native species are being rediscovered as an aquarium species. Not since the 1920's have so many people inquired about and begun keeping natives. Not surprisingly the sunfishes a usually the first Native fish people keep. As a general rule they are very durable , tolerant of most anything and tough as nails. In temperament they are usually one or two notches below an Oscar. Aggressive but not completely intolerant of other fish.

The Central Longear is in my opinion the best sunfish for the novice to keep. It's combination of color, manageable size (under 6 inches in most cases) and temperament make it the ideal native for the aquarist new to native fish . Its overall body shape rounded and slightly reminiscent of the Discus and it's life colors are nothing short of spectacular. Here is how Plieger describes them in his **Fishes of Missouri** pg. 268.

Life Colors: Back and sides blue-green speckled with yellow and emerald; belly yellow and orange . Side of head olive or light orange with emerald-blue vermiculations. ear flap black, often with a narrow white border. Fins without prominent spots or blotches. Breeding males have all colors more intense, with the undersurface of the head and belly bright orange-red.

When in the aquarium they quickly adapt and will take in a variety of foods. I do mean VARIETY, I have seen them fed everything from flake food to cat chow, including all the standard frozen and live foods. I have even known people who have kept pond outside near a bug zapper. Their Longears have thrived on the near misses and half shocked insects!

One of the best things about the Central Longear is its abundance and extensive range. If you live in the middle third of this country you are in Longear country! They are easy to collect from a suitable sight with seine, hook and worm or dry fly. When you get one they are easy to identify. Their unmistakable ear flap is up to 1/3 or their body length in size and black as tar.

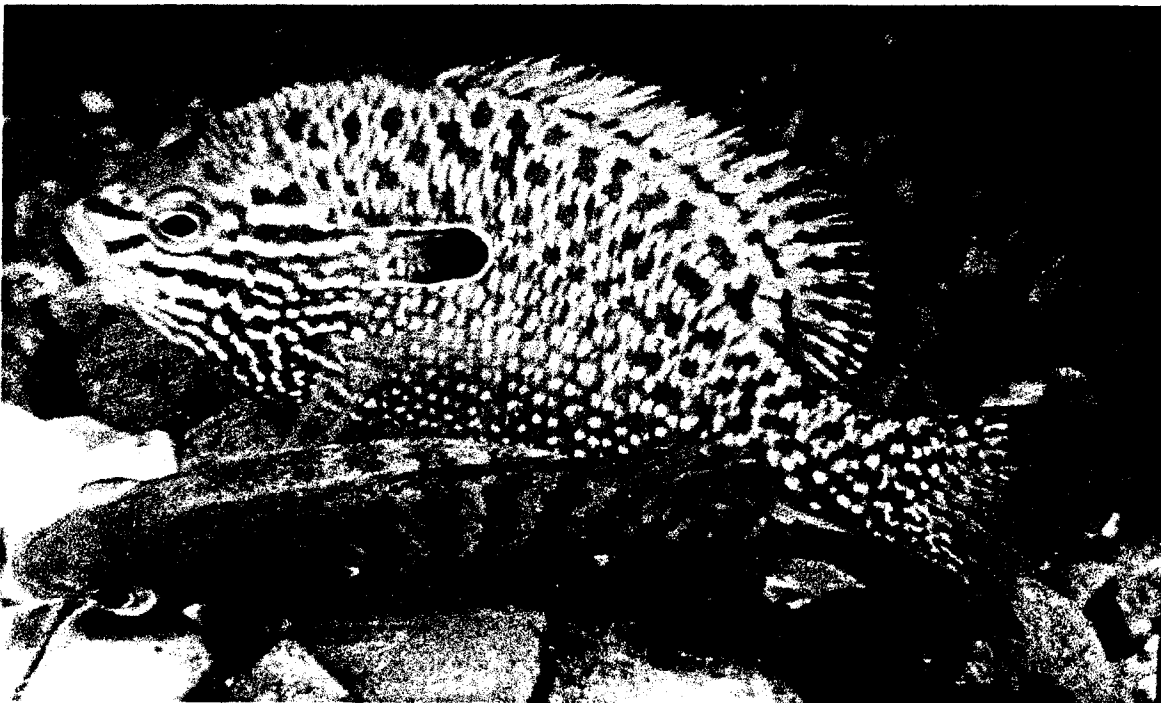
If you are interested in breeding this fascinating sunfish it's a snap. In the laboratory with the proper diet, and temperature (77 F.) and an extended photo period they have spawned every 10-14 days for over a year! So even an inexperienced aquarist has a good shot at a successful spawn of these gems.

I have found that the Longears from Missouri and Arkansas are the most colorful and make the best stock to start from. However You may find a different local strain that catches your eye with just the right color and size mix for you. If so go for it. That is one of the great joys of

collecting is finding that local strain that catches your eye. Let me know what you find!

If you like the Cichlid family I promise you, you'll love the Central Longear. With his twisting palette of colors he is as colorful as any Cichlid and is as personable as a fish can get. They are as easy to care for as any fish I've ever kept. Why once I left some in a 5 gallon bucket after a collecting trip for over a week only to find a male guarding a fresh batch of eggs! Mine commonly eat out of my hand and will allow me to pick them up with my hand! So if you wanna go Native I

have just the fish for you. If you would be interested in collecting native fish but do not know where to start. I recommend you try your states DNR or your regional NANFA (North American Native Fish Association) Chairman (I am one) as a starting point. If you have a question or comment or want to know the NANFA regional chairman near you. Contact me at fidonet 1:280\112 or call me at 1-913-381-0943 if you would like to talk on the phone. Until next time good luck and good fishing!



Lepomis megalotis breeding. Photo by G. Sneegas