

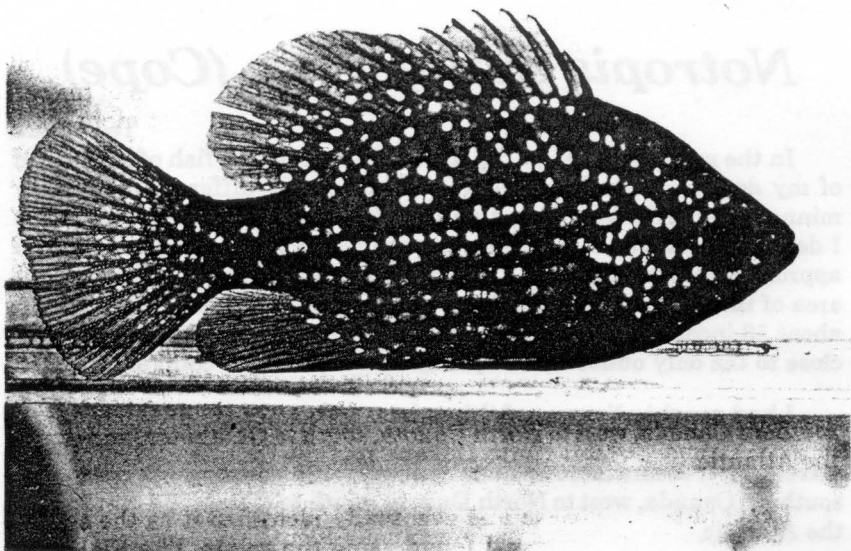
Diamonds in the Rough

Ross Brock

Maybe someone out there will disagree with me, but there are no freshwater tropical fishes and few marines that can outdo the coloration of the diamond sunfish *Enneacanthus gloriosus*. Males just out of their native waters are greenish black in color with an ample sprinkling of iridescent blue spots about the body. To top this off the anal and pectoral fins are the color of rich mahogany which really makes them a sight to behold. Females are about the same color only not quite as dark and with fewer spangles.

Diamonds are found in swampy areas throughout much of the Atlantic Coastal Plain from New Jersey to Florida. Barrow pits, sloughs, and floodplain ponds are good places to look for them. Pay particular attention to areas where the bottom ooze is just that, sort of black and **sticky**. Mats of hair **gram**, *Bacopa*, *Anacharis*, and such are preferred for shelter and hunting. Being centrarchids, diamonds are typically predatory. Ghost shrimp and **pigmy** sunfish of the genus *Elassoma* rate highly in the typical diamond's diet.

Seining isn't a very effecting method for collecting *E. gloriosus*, unless the bottom of the net is weighted heavily enough so that it digs up a little bit of the ooze and plant material. Use of a dip net with a five to six inch long handle is far better. Pull the net toward you through the weed clumps and you should turn up one or two diamonds with every haul. Don't overlook even the very shallowest spots right up to the shoreline. That scantest half inch or so of water can provide safe haven from bigger fish.



Ennaecanthus gloriosus, diamond sunfish. Photo by Ross Brock

As you collect the fish, pick up a few sprigs of whatever green stuff they are living in. Don't worry about any buggers that may come in as extras on the plants. Unless they are something like predaceous diving beetles or dragonfly nymphs, there shouldn't be any problem. Besides, everything that can be brought in from the wild adds just that much to make the new pets feel at home.

Soft, acid water is about the only way to go with *gloriosus*. One of the creeks that I catch them from is extremely clean and would be clear except for the brown stain derived from the tannic acid leaked from a myriad of leaves that litter the forest floor in the deep swamp.

Live food is preferred bill of fare. Ghost shrimp, *Elassoma* species, and various small insects are taken in the wild. Captive specimens like live and frozen brine shrimp, white worms, daphnia, and the like. With a little bit of patience on your part, they might learn to take dry food readily. But don't rely on it alone.

Now, take a look at the picture accompanying this article. Then look up the poor color photo in the Exotic Fishes Looseleaf by T. F. H. Publications. The only thing left to do now is to plan a collecting to get some of your own. Happy hunting!