

ELASSOMA EVERGLADEI

by Roger Przybysz

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Why they call Elassoma evergladei a pygmy "sunfish," I don't know, for they look nothing like our familiar coldwater game fish. They look more like a killifish. They are native to the southern United States from North Carolina to Florida. You don't find evergladei in too many fish shops, for they are very small and timid, and do better if kept in a small aquarium by themselves. My first trio of these fish were purchased at a Southwestern Michigan Aquarium Society auction.

This trio was placed in a bare 10-gallon tank with a sponge filter and a large clump of Java Moss. A five-gallon tank would have been fine too. The water was a medium hardness and a neutral pH. The tank temperature was kept between 72 and 74 degrees for breeding, but they can withstand temperatures as low as 60 degrees. Some type of fine-leaf plant is needed, since E. evergladei lays its eggs in them. The fish prefer live food, but I got by with newly hatched baby brine shrimp and, later, frozen adult brine shrimp. Flake foods were totally ignored.

When mature, the sexes are very easy to distinguish. The male is slender and about 1½" long. He will turn almost black with turquoise iridescent blotches during spawning. By contrast, the female will become very plump and is very pale in color. The male will establish his territory in the Java Moss, and will coax the female to the spawning site where the eggs are to be scattered and fertilized.

Eggs hatch in about three days. The tiny fry will be observed hopping around the bottom of the tank. My fry were fed Liquifry until they could accept baby brine shrimp. Not trusting the parents, I have removed them after a week to another tank I had prepared for them, and they have continued to spawn there. If well fed, the parents will ignore the fry, and the male will start spawning with the second female.

The trio of Elassoma evergladei bred very easily. The females, if fed frequently, will spawn every ten days. Their fry are slow to grow, attaining sexual maturity in nine months.