

THE FLAGFIN MINNOW, NOTROPIS SIGNIPINNIS

by DICK STOBER

Notropis signipinnis, also called the flagfin minnow (or the 'purdy minner') is a beautiful native American fish of our southeasterly states. This beauty shows a preference for small, clear, spring-fed streams and narrow, deep channels, widening out at times into pools or briskly cascading over rocky ledges. Shade or bright sunlight, it doesn't seem to matter to the frelicking flagfin. Small schools of twenty to thirty can be seen feeding near the surface in pools and eddies and around bridges or culverts where they can easily be collected with a small seine or dip net.

It's a real treat to sit on a warm rock in the bright sunlight under an icy blue Alabama sky, looking at a bagful of beautiful flagfins. It is apparent where this name comes from, as they fly the national colors of Spain. The pectoral and pelvic fins are predominantly yellow. The dorsal, anal and caudal fins are yellow close to the body, warming to a brilliant reddish orange toward the extremities. The rays of the dorsal and anterior rays of the anal are bordered by black except at the top and bottom in the vicinity of the caudal spot. The base color of the body is pearly. A rose-violet iridescent lateral band passes from the tail through the upper part of the eye to the snout. Below this color band is a wider black band. The body coloration is very similar to the African Pelvicachromis pulcher. Without going into too much detail it would probably suffice to say that the body shape of signipinnis differs from that of most species of Notropis in that the body is broader in the vertical plane rather than the usual oblong minnow shape. Most reference books claim that the average length of signipinnis is two inches, but we grow them big in Mobile County with males averaging closer to three inches from the snout to the base of the caudal fin. Breeding males display nuptial tubercles on the chin, lower jaws and on the side of the head. Females are without tubercles.

In general appearance the male has a broader lateral band of black with more intense coloration than the female (which is otherwise quite similarly colored). After careful inspection this difference becomes obvious, but at first glance differentiation of the sexes is difficult. A congenial community tank member with an easy to please appetite, it loves TetraMin. Notropis signipinnis feels right at home swimming in the effluent of the power filter. You can watch them darting in and out during feeding time, eating the food drawn into the water by the current. The flagfin is classified as a forage fish with an important link in the food chain of our southern streams. We must all exert every effort to preserve this beauty by preserving its native habitats.

A closely related minnow is N. hypselopterus, illustrated in Innes' EXOTIC AQUARIUM FISHES and in Axelrod et al.'s EXOTIC TROPICAL FISHES (F-446.00).

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