

# HUMMINGBIRD FISH By Wayne Babberl

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This is not the name of the fish, of course, as the title tries to make you believe. It is, however, a rather fitting name for these little bottom dwelling wing-finned Darters. Darter is the name commonly used for these interesting natives of Eastern North America which are actually part of the Perch family. Samuel Eddy, in his guide "How to Know the Freshwater Fishes", lists over ninety species found in North America of which it is reported that seventeen have been found in Iowa. Being members of the Perch family, they have long, rather slender bodies with a small pointed head with the eyes set well forward giving them rather comical binocular eyesight. They also have a completely separate double dorsal fin with the forward one being spined and the rear one being soft rayed.

Unlike their larger cousins, the Yellow Perch, Sauger and Walleye, the Darters have no commercial or "sport" value as a game fish. They are indeed the miniatures of the Perch family, seldom exceeding three or four inches in length. The majority of the species prefer the swift flowing portion of a stream, especially the shallow, pebbly rapids. Here their enlarged pectoral fins and the fact that they hug the bottom down among the rocks enables them to maintain themselves in the swift water.

In the aquarium, they are delightful little fish that are constantly on the lookout for food. Having no air sack for buoyancy, they must maintain themselves off the bottom with a series of sharp little jerks or darts at feeding time, not being content to wait passively on the bottom for the food to drift down to them. On the bottom, they jump or dart from one spot to another constantly propped up on their stiff pelvic fins, content to roost on the edge of a rock or stick ready to propel themselves off in an instant.

The little Rainbow Darters, Etheostoma caeruleum, that I have seem to be doing very well out of the wild. They are constantly hungry and eat dry food well enough but will simply gorge themselves in frozen brine shrimp. The Rainbow Darter is rare in Iowa waters and these came to me from Missouri by the courtesy of Mr. C.W. Tombough of Kansas City. He and several others in the vicinity make collecting of Native fishes a large part of their hobby. He gives one warning about transporting these fish, since they come from swift flowing, well oxygenated water, they must be kept in an aerated container until they are placed in the home aquarium. As little as one hour in a closed bag and they will succumb.

Like most of the North American fishes these spawn in the spring with the males taking on very beautiful and at times unbelievable colors. Spawning should be possible with a little care taken to duplicate the conditions of nature with the gradual warming of spring, lots of fresh water and a longer photo period. This is a very desirable fish for the home aquarium whether it is kept with other natives or mixed with tropicalls. Its comical appearance and actions, along with its beauty at spring time make it a winner.