

MEET THE BLUE-SPOTTED SUNFISH

by ROBERT T. ROSEN

Blue Spotted Sunfish (*Enneacanthus obesus* and *E. gloriosus*) are one of the prettiest and certainly one of the more peaceful members of a generally pugnacious family. These pygmies are the often over-looked cousins of the Black-Banded Sunfish (*Mesogonistius Chaetodon*), however, the difficulties in keeping and raising these other midgets and some of their larger cousins make the Blue Spotted Sunfish seem like an ideal aquarium species.

The Blue Spotted Sunfish were extremely easy to collect and during a fish kill resulting from a storm which washed pesticides off a farmer's crop into the river, I decided to rescue a few.

The sexes, at maturity, are very easy to tell apart. The male is a dark brown color with iridescent blue spots covering his body. His dorsal and caudal fins are a deep red color. The female is rather plain.

These wild fishes are also one of the most timid little creatures you will ever put in your aquarium. They hate the incandescent or fluorescent aquarium lighting. If the light is turned on in the morning, even if the room is well lit before hand, they will attempt to burrow under the gravel and eventually some will damage themselves. They will sit motionless and hide until the light is turned off. Therefore, even though the adults are beautiful, resist the temptation to collect them. The one-quarter to one-half inch fry are the secret to raising the species. They are tough, adaptable, friendly, and will learn to tolerate the overhead light within a few weeks. Also within a very short time the fry will learn to accept brine shrimp, (live nauplii), live tubifex worms, and then some frozen brine shrimp and frozen blood worms. My Blue Spotted Sunfish have never accepted any food that floats, such as any of the prepared flake or powdered foods.

The fry grew slowly, but by the following spring they had turned into two and one-half inch adults. At this time the familiar breeding colors were prevalent. They had developed none of the fear common to wild adults. I decided it was time to attempt breeding a pair.

I set a ten gallon tank aside and left the water to condition for a few days. I made the water slightly acid. Since I used no light or cover with the tank, I left the water level four or five inches from the top. Then I "seeded" the tank with live tubifex worms, disconnected the corner filter and attached an air stone. After a few days a "microworm" type culture developed which could be a first food for the fry. The baby tubifex worms swam through the aquarium and crawled on the glass sides. Next, in went one male and two females - one for good luck. At first the fish were terrified and hid. Two days later I observed that the male had claimed territory on one side of the aquarium was busy chasing females behind the disconnected filter which still remained on the other side. I rubbed over

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the area of gravel that the male was guarding with a small hand net and found eggs. They were small, not nearly the size of killie eggs, but they were still easy to see under a bright light. I then removed the male and two females from the aquarium. I placed a fluorescent light on the top and waited. Nothing happened except a lot of eggs got fungus. A bad first spawn. Nothing new. Two Corydoras cleaned the tank up in two days and then I added more tubifex worms to start another culture. Back into the tank went another male and two females for another try. (This time I added some acriflavine as a fungus preventative).

The male soon set up a nest and I watched him lure the females in to spawn. They touched and waded over the nest in a sensuous dance. The next day the male was again pushing the females out of his territory and into hiding. Examination of the gravel again revealed the presence of eggs and the adults were removed.

Two days later the sides of the glass had a few transparent bodies clinging to them, and in a few days more the whole tank was covered with these transparent bodies. Not even eyes were visible at first, but these developed in about a week. Soon the babies were free-swimming. After the first few days their bodies were bulging with the baby brine shrimp which they readily gobbled. After two weeks without a filter in the aquarium, the water started to foul and I felt that the babies had to be transferred to clean water. They were surprisingly adaptable to change and I lost only one out of the hundred and forty-odd babies that I counted.

I now have sixteen two inch fish left. I lost two or three fish every day for the first month or so, due to the larger fry preying on the smaller ones. I don't have the tank space available which would be required to separate that many fry so that the killing would stop. It might require dozens of aquariums.

The remaining sixteen will mature in a few months, and hopefully a third generation might be available for those aquarists who might be interested in obtaining the BLUE SPOTTED SUNFISH.
