

A NATIVE FISH COMMUNITY TANK

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Reprinted from Tropical Topics, the official publication of the Indianapolis Aquarium Society.

The minnow family (Cyprinidae) is the largest of the fresh water fish families, being distributed not only throughout the United States and Canada, but Africa and Asia as well. It is not surprising then that there would be a wide variety of habitat, spawning habits and food preference found within the family.

Also, it is to be expected that within this large number of species many would make good aquarium fish. Three species which make up a good community tank are the Redfin Shiner, Notropis umbratilus cyanocephalus; the Black Nosed Dace, Rinichthys strattulus meleagris; and the Redbellied Dace, Chrosomos erythrogaster.

In the Black Nose, the color pattern is very simply a black and white effect. The belly is stark white, above this is a jet black lateral line, rather wide, which runs from the tip of the snout through the lower part of the eye to the caudal fin. The back is brown with dark spots scattered throughout. In the spring, the head of the males may have tubercles and the fins may show some yellow.

Spring males of the Redbellied Dace are, in my opinion, one of our most beautiful natives. The back on the male is an olive green, with a red spot at the base of the dorsal fin. Two dark, almost black bands enclose a yellow band which runs from the snout to the caudal. The lower of these dark bands borders and contrasts nicely with the crimson red of the belly. Fins are flushed with yellow.

Colors in the Redfin Shiner are simple but effective. The back is a dark blue-gray, while the sides are lighter blue blending into a stark white belly. Fins are all pink to deep red, while the head is a brilliant blue.

While the color descriptions given are for spring or breeding colors, none of these fish change colors so much that they lose their identity in the aquarium.

In our area, Indiana, all of these minnows are found in flowing streams and all are found over gravel or stone bottoms. Spawn is deposited in the gravel and ignored. The Redbellied Dace is said to spawn in vegetation. My wife and I watched from a high bank of Crooked Creek as a group of Redfins spawned in a riffle over a coarse gravel bottom. To be comfortable these species should have as large a tank as possible. They are active fishes and should have plenty of aeration, and frequent water changes. (Continued on page 12)

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They take almost any kind of food, of course some live food or frozen food should be given. Mine have always preferred brine shrimp or daphnae over any other food.

These are small fish, 3 inches being maximum length, and very well suited for aquarium life. Temperature fluxuations are no problem if not too sudden. Room temperature (70°F) is ideal as long as there is filtration and aeration. In a 55 gallon tank these three species will blend into a single school and then separate into single species groups.

Mostly they swim in the middle depth and feed from this level. The Black Nosed Dace is the only one of the three species which seems to have any tendency to feed from the bottom, but only if following food to the bottom.

We have kept these fish in a 100 gallon tank for over a year and have had many compliments on them. They are active and hardy, easily fed and in every way a desirable aquarium fish. If you live in the middle west they should not be too difficult to find.