

# THE NATIVE FLYING FISH

By Ray Katula

In the search of obtaining an unusual yet common and interesting fish I encountered the brook silverside, *Labidesthes sicculus*. The brook silverside is prolific and flourishing in nature but it is a task to keep it from perishing in aquaria. The brook silverside is an important food source for predatory fish such as bowfins and black basses. Shoals of them are relished by the predatory fish every year. The brook silverside even benefits man in its habits. It consumes great numbers of mosquito larvae every year. The silverside has been observed to eat eggs also. If silversides were not present in our area the mosquitos could be a threat to man as some are a host to a parasite that causes the much dreaded sleeping sickness that can be fatal.

The brook silverside relishes other insects found lurking upon the surface of the water. Its diet also consists of green algae and other soft foliage. Duckweed should be offered as a supplement to floating foods such as dry flake, daphnia and glass worms. The brook silverside often hesitates to eat frozen foods but may, given time. Its diet should be changed frequently as feeding one type of food over long periods of time causes the silverside to perish since it is sensitive to malnutrition.

Preparing a tank for housing silversides should be done carefully. The water should consist partly of the water found at the silverside habitat. Filtering the water through glass wool should rid it of most harmful parasites. Algae are not harmful. About three fourths of the water should be natural. The rest should be distilled or rain water. The pH should be somewhat neutral. The tank should hold at least eight gallons of water. A fifteen gallon is preferred. The substratum should consist of washed beach sand. The tank housing the silversides should be low with plenty of surface area as these are surface dwellers. The tank should contain vegetation such as water sprite, anacharis, milfoil, ambulia and subulata plus other native plants.

Aeration should be strong but not vivid. The tank should be covered. Evolution has provided this fish with two somewhat elongated pectoral fins. The silverside is capable of flying up to thirty feet. It is magnificent to see a school in flight, but flights are usually short.

I have observed it spawning in nature but don't pretend to have bred them in aquaria as this task is apparently difficult. In the Spring they swim up small sloughs adjacent to the river. During this period they rarely school and only swim in pairs. The male swims along beside the female and roe and milt are expelled immediately. Each egg has a tiny sticky filament that sticks to anything that it has contact with. Most often the adult silversides die within a couple of weeks after spawning as their life span is short, about one year if fortunate enough to last through the harsh, cold winter.

It can be found from the Mississippi drainage eastward.