

# A RAINBOW IN MINIATURE

by Anthony Benages (Indianapolis Aquarium Society )

We are now observing a new "trend" for the aquarium hobby in the United States. That trend is the maintenance of native fish in the aquarium. I am sure that the most of us are well aware that our natives are kept by European aquarists as much as we keep exotic fish.

Probably all of us have heard the expression, "A fish like a prophet, is often without honor in its own country". Before long, most of us will probably tire of the constant use of this expression. However, once the hobbyist has seen either the orange-throated darter (*Etheostoma spectabile*) or the rainbow darter (*E. caeruleum*), he will begin to wonder why he has been spending money on the exotics.

The darters are generally considered to be the most desirable members of the PERCIDAE, the Perch family. They have in most cases, no air bladders, and those that do have them have only rudimentary, non-functional ones. Due to the inconvenience, they are usually located in rocky-bottomed, fast-running streams, where they can be seen if you have sharp eyes, darting between the larger rocks.

Due to the environment they are accustomed to, darters are very particular about their tank conditions. First of all, it is very difficult to get them anything but live foods. They particularly relish tubiflex, daphnia, and adult brine shrimp. When you get them to eat something else besides live foods, it will probably be frozen brine shrimp or daphnia.

Another requirement is the duplication of their water conditions. Coming from fast flowing streams, they are accustomed to clean, cool, well-aerated water. Their tank should be a shallow tank (such a 20 gallon long) with large pebble natural gravel. No heater should be used, and besides a very good filtration system, 2 to 3 air stones should be placed in the tank for good aeration.

There are a few drawbacks to keeping darters. One of these is that they cannot be crowded in tanks like tropical fish since they have a higher oxygen requirement. A second drawback is that they cannot be purchased from your local pet store. If you want darters, you have to suffer through the fresh air, the exercise, and the experience of the outdoors.

If you have trouble getting your friends up early in the morning to catch darters, and you have to go by yourself, you will need 1 to 2 large (10 to 12 inch wide) nets. With one hand, hold the net downstream all the way down into the gravel. With your other hand, start upturning rocks and gravel in the direction of the net from a distance of 3 to 4 feet upstream from you. You might also try placing the net under heavy vegetation at the bank of the stream and lifting the net up into the vegetation. These procedures will usually result in a large number of darters from which you will be able to select the ones you want. (continued on page 6)

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However, you might be lucky and be able to rouse your sleepy friends from their downy paradise. If you can, you will have better luck with a small-mesh seine. One or two of you should hold the seine downstream and the other one should start upstream upturning rocks and moving gravel towards the net.

You will be tempted to keep all of the fish you have collected since they are all so beautiful. However, you should keep only those which can be safely be put in your tanks, If you get greedy and decide to keep them all, you will probably lose them all because of overcrowding.