

MAINTAINING THE RIVER CARPSUCKER (*Carpiodes carpio*) IN THE AQUARIUM by David Arbour, DeQueen, Arkansas

After catching some young (1.5") River Carpsuckers this past summer, I heard that the genus Carpiodes can be difficult to maintain in aquaria. Determined to maintain this species successfully, I placed individuals in two different aquariums.

Those placed in a 20-gal. community tank with a gravel bottom and moderate planting refused to feed on the gravel bottom. They would only feed by grazing the smooth surfaces of broad-leafed plants and the end walls of the tank where I allowed algae to grow. Because these areas collected very little of the food that was placed in the tank, and because the carpsuckers were frequently chased by aggressive male Red Shiners (Cyprinella [Notropis] lutrensis), these individuals soon wasted away.

The other tank was an old slate-bottom 10-gal. that I had been using as a holding tank. It lacked gravel, rocks, and plants, and had a box filter in the corner. Other fishes in the tank were small cyprinids of several species which schooled together close to the bottom. The young carpsuckers seemed to enjoy schooling with these other peaceful species and were soon grazing over the smooth slate bottom.

In an effort to get food to the bottom before the more versatile-feeding tankmates consumed most of it, I started feeding mostly shrimp pellets. The pellets would drop straight to the bottom and slowly dissolve, scattering small particles all over the bottom as the other fishes fed on them. The carpsuckers had no trouble at all obtaining food presented in this way, and were soon very fat and growing. They also enjoyed feedings of live brine shrimp, which they would pick up while grazing over the slate bottom.

In both situations, the carpsuckers did not feed by sight and would encounter food only by accident as they randomly grazed the bottom. They seemed, however, to be aware that food had been placed in the tank, either by smell or the other fishes' activity or both, and would greatly increase their grazing activity when so moved.

In thinking back to the habitat where I caught the carpsuckers, I remember that they were found in schools over a smooth sand bottom in an eddy next to a strong current. This species and probably the whole Carpiodes genus is evidently adapted to feed only on smooth surfaces. They are reluctant to feed on gravel bottoms, at least while young.

In summary, I would recommend from my experience in keeping this species that young individuals of this genus would probably do best in an aquarium with a smooth bottom such as slate or sand, and in a schooling situation with either their own kind or similarly sized peaceful cyprinids. Also, a food type such as pellet food that can be easily placed on the bottom, especially in a mixed-species tank, is a must. This species grazes almost continuously on the bottom, and would probably benefit from frequent feedings.

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