

ROACHES!!!

by David L. Hall, Lohman, Missouri

Roaches...the very thought sends many a person running for the insecticide. No one likes those ugly disease-carriers. California Roaches, however, are another matter altogether. No, the California Roach is not a funny-smelling cigarette that some people smoke in order to get high, nor is it a special breed of cockroach found only in the Golden State. California Roaches are an interesting species of fish.

Lavinia symmetricus (also known as Hesperoleucas symmetricus) is a chunky minnow with large eyes and a small mouth which turns slightly downward. The upper part of the Roach's body is a dusky gray and the lower portion is a dull silvery color. Breeding males have reddish-orange on the chin and sometimes on the fins. Adult California Roaches usually do not exceed 4".

The California Roach inhabits small streams throughout northern and central California and south-central Oregon. It is an abundant fish because it can survive under adverse conditions. Yet they do have their limits, as Moyle reports in his book Inland Fishes of California, L. symmetricus is declining due to deteriorating environment and the introduction of non-native species.

I collected my Roaches in Northern California while visiting my brother who lives in Roseville, a fast-growing community near Sacramento. There are several small streams which flow in and around Roseville, and I sampled several of them. The fish I kept were taken from the Cirby Creek, which had a sandy bottom and an abundance of trash in it and along the banks. I found L. symmetricus in association with Mosquitofish (Gambusia affinis), small sunfish (possibly Lepomis cyanellus), and crayfish. It is surprising that the California Roaches haven't been wiped out in these creeks with the deteriorating environment and the non-native fishes, but it seems to be only a matter of time.

The fish I caught survived five days of shuttling around in styros and plastic bags. I made water changes approximately twice during the five days. Initially, I lost six fish on the day I caught them, possibly due to shock. The 15 other fish survived the trip home, but after acclimation I lost three more. Out of the 12 remaining individuals I traded six, and the remaining six continued to do well.

I house my California Roaches in a 15-gallon aquarium with an undergravel filter. L. symmetricus will eat just about anything. I have fed my fish flake foods, frozen brine shrimp, and white worms.

They seem to feed by sight, as do many minnows with large eyes. They are a very active fish, and, like most cyprinids, will jump out of the tank if it is not kept covered.

L. symmetricus are an interesting addition to my fishroom. I hope to do some more collecting in California soon, but this time I hope to bring back some other California species. In the meantime, maybe some of our Golden State members will write about their favorite fish and collecting spots so that I will know what to look for and where to look for them.

Reference

Moyle, Peter B. Inland Fishes of California. University of California Press, Berkeley, California. 1976.