

# Fish in Focus: Rosyface Chub, *Hybopsis rubrifrons*

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*Notropis*, *Nocomis*, *Hybopsis*, Oh my! What is this straw-colored minnow I see in the Atlantic coast streams of South Carolina and Georgia, mixed in with the *Notropis* shiners and the *Nocomis* chubs? Looks a little like each, and at different times it has been categorized in each genus. But it is neither; instead it is *Hybopsis rubrifrons*, the Rosyface Chub. And this is one of those scientific names that really tells it all. *Hybopsis* means round faced, which fits the somewhat bulbous snout on this minnow. The specific name, *rubrifrons*, means red forehead, which is the distinctive characteristic that separates this minnow from others in its genus. It is listed as being discovered in the South Fork of Ocmulgee River at Flat Rock, DeKalb County, Georgia and described in 1877 by the preeminent ichthyologist David Starr Jordan. But as a Georgia resident, I have to point out that it is actually the South River that is a tributary of the Ocmulgee River that runs through DeKalb County. And while there is no specific town called Flat Rock in this part of Georgia, there are several churches, cemeteries and schools in the area that bear the name.

Unlike the shiners it closely resembles, especially the Spottail Shiner, *Notropis hudsonius*, the Rosyface Chub has a barbel at the corner of the mouth. In other drainages, the *Hybopsis* species that will be seen is the wide ranging Bigeye Chub, *Hybopsis amblops*, or maybe the Pallid Shiner, *Hybopsis amnis*. These are basically silvery fish, without much other color. And despite the name, in the case of the Rosyface Chub, there is not a lot of color for most of the year. For most of the year, its basically just a straw-colored-above, white-colored-below chub. But in the spring, they live up to their common name. The front of the fish becomes rosy red as the chub gets ready to spawn. The scales on the side of the fish seem to take on more of a reflective sheen, and the lateral line seems to stand out more. Around here, in the Upper Oconee River drainage, they are often mixed in schools with Yellowfin Shiners, *Notropis lutipinnis*, over Bluehead Chub, *Nocomis leptocephalus*, nests. A very colorful assemblage here in the streams of the South!

I have personally found them in small, spring-fed stream heads as well as much farther downstream in medium-sized streams.

Occasionally, I only see one, but usually where there is one there are quite a few of these sociable, community fish. They are reported to spawn over Bluehead Chub nests, and certainly there have been Bluehead Chubs in the streams that I have found Rosyface Chubs. I have also observed these chubs schooling with Yellowfin Shiners, and Fieryblack Shiners, *Cyprinella pyrrhomelas*, in a stream in South Carolina. They were distinctive even when viewed from above the water by their yellowish backs. In Georgia, they seem to show up in most streams that have Yellowfin Shiners, and are usually schooling with them. In one location, which I sampled in the early spring, they were the primary fish captured in the seine that day, and most were full-sized adults showing good color. These were found mostly close to cover, but seemed to be getting ready to spawn. Not only were they more colored than normal, they seemed to be more densely grouped than I have seen them in other situations. Instead of being mixed with



Fig. 1.

A closeup of the Rosyface Chub's head. During the breeding season, its pigments intensify to a deep red, signaling the individual's not-so-subtle excited inhibition of impending *amore*, from which the species derives its name.



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*Fig. 2.*

A male Rosyface Chub, *Hybopsis rubrifrons*, from McNutt Creek in the Upper Oconee River Drainage, Georgia.

the *Notropis* in sort of a random fashion, they were all grouped together, 12 to 15 brightly colored *Hybopsis* in a single seine-haul.

In aquariums, they seem to also appreciate the company of other minnows. They usually school with Yellowfin Shiners, but Rosyface Chubs tend to hang somewhat back from the main group and stay lower in the water column. Like some other chubs, they appear to prefer finding the slack water and tend to hang out there a little more than the shiners do. But when the food hits the water, they use their speed and large low-slung mouth to make sure that they get their

share. Somewhat larger than the Yellowfin Shiners, they dash in and gobble up whatever is offered (frozen, flake, even shrimp pellets which they hold in their mouths until they soften somewhat). And while they will feed in the water column they also root around in the substrate long after all of the food has fallen to bottom. They make a hardy aquarium inhabitant and all around good community fish.

**Pertinent Literature:** Jordan D. S. 1877. *Annals of the Lyceum of Natural History of New York* v. 11 (nos. 11-12):330. 