

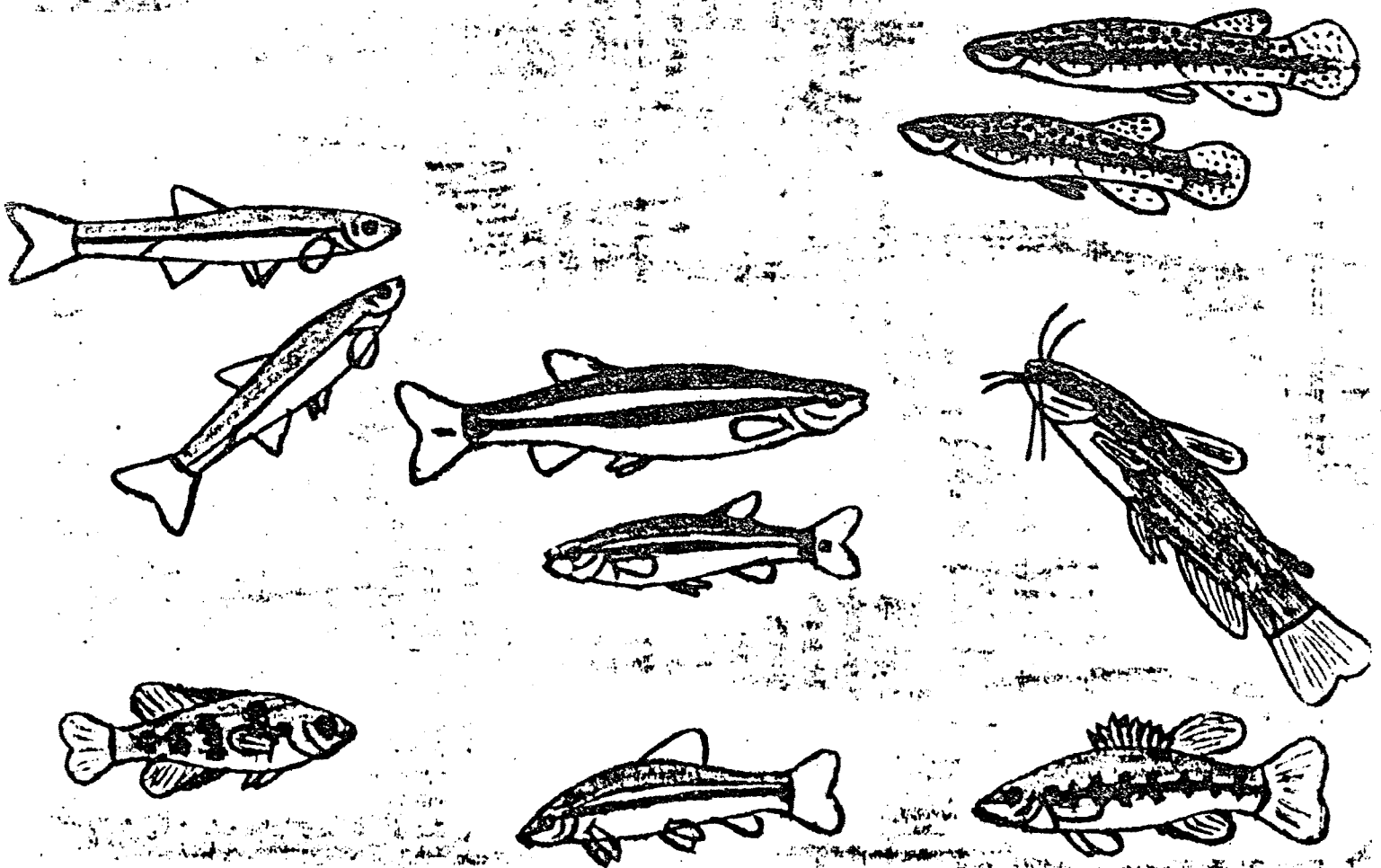
SOUTHERN NATIVES IN A COMMUNITY TANK

by Hal E. Armes, Pleasant Grove, Miss.

I've read a lot about spawning and maintaining various types of native fish, but I haven't read much about the good old community set-up. We have a lot of natives that are quite attractive as community fish.

A nice community tank should have all levels occupied. The waters of Northwest Mississippi can supply fish for all the requisite levels. A school of Blackspotted Topminnows (*Fundulus olivaceus*) make good decoration for the upper level. Creek Chubs (*Semotilus atromaculatus*), also black-striped, will move around all levels of the aquarium and fill in any vacant levels. It's not unusual for me to catch four- to six-inch specimens, and once I even caught a whopping nine-incher. His body color had faded to a silvery gray and his fins were a rosy pink, as compared to the usual colorless fins on smaller specimens.

A few large shiners will occupy the middle levels, while smaller specimens seem to prefer slightly higher locations. Green Sunfish (*Lepomis cyanellus*) and other members of the sunfish family, such as Bluegills (*L. macrochirus*), will also occupy the middle levels. At the bottom of the tank, darters may be OK, if



SOUTHERN COMMUNITY

Hal Armes

all the other fish are small, otherwise, a young Largemouth Bass (Micropterus salmoides), a Black Crappie (Pomoxis nigromaculatus), and a few Creek Chubsuckers (Erimyzon oblongus)—called "Buffalo Suckers" locally—will fill the tab. Some bullhead catfish (Ictalurus spp.) will keep the tank active when the lights go out. Most of the above fish adapt quite readily to the aquarium and to flake and pelleted fish foods, though darters may continue to prefer live food and shun prepared ones. The bullheads hide most of the time during the day and should have a few pellets dropped into the tank after it is completely dark; otherwise, the other fish will get it all, especially the rather piggish chubsuckers. The chubsuckers should have some powder, such as that which comes from the bottom of a box of pellets, placed under the water surface so as to make it sink rapidly. While they have big appetites, they are comparatively slow feeders in the community I've described. While the other fish go after the larger food particles, the powder will fall to the bottom where the chubsuckers will find it.

I'd like to shatter the common fallacy that natives cannot be kept with tropical fish. Of you readers who keep native fish, I'd like to ask how many of you keep your tank directly in front of an air-conditioner during the summer? Not many, huh? Maybe you keep it in the refrigerator, or add three ice cubes per gallon every hour. Of course, most of us hobbyists are rich enough to afford our own refrigerated tanks. I'm sure by now you can see what I'm getting at—we all keep our aquariums at room temperature. What about you tropical-fish keepers? Do you heat your aquariums in the summer? How about winter? If you keep your home between 70° and 80°F, what's the need? It may occasionally be necessary to heat a tropical-fish tank in winter, but even so, we probably still won't heat it to more than 80. It's true that most tropical fish occupy warmer water than most of our native fish for a longer period of time; however, during the cooler months in tropical countries, the water often reaches a temperature which coincides with our water temperatures during the warmer months. Further, the breeding temperatures of most tropical fish are between 70° and 80°F, also the breeding range of many of our natives. My Blackstripe Topminnows have spawned repeatedly at 76°. There are exceptions to this general adaptability, though; for instance, fish coming from extremely cold waters, such as those fed by melting glaciers, certainly couldn't survive tropical temperatures; but then again, they probably couldn't survive your home temperature either.

Many times I have mixed tropicals, natives, and goldfish with no problems at all. Of course, it's not a good idea to place very large fish in the same tank with very small fish, but I have even broken this rule many times with no problem. For example, large shiners have very small mouths and are not very aggressive. Goldfish, too, are basically very docile, though they will eat other fish they can swallow easily. Topminnows stay so close to the surface that they usually pay little attention to fish at lower levels. "Buffalo

KEY TO ILLUSTRATION, LEFT

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| 1 | 5 | 1. Shiners (<u>Notropis</u> sp.); 2. Green Sunfish (<u>Lepomis cyanellus</u>); 3. Creek Chubs (<u>Semotilus atromaculatus</u>); 4. Creek Chubsucker ("Buffalo Sucker") (<u>Erimyzon oblongus</u>); 5. Blackspotted Topminnow (<u>Fundulus olivaceus</u>); 6. Black Bullhead (<u>Ictalurus melas</u>); 7. Largemouth Bass (<u>Micropterus salmoides</u>). |
| 2 | 6 | |
| 3 | 7 | |
| 4 | | |

Suckers," the Creek Chubsuckers, are superior scavengers--much better than corydoras--and they don't bother anybody; even baby fish are fairly safe unless they practically swim into the chubsucker's mouth. Some of our natives are tastefully attracted to the bright coloring of some tropical fish. There are, also, few natives I would trust with such long-finned fish as angel fish, or brightly colored fish such as Cardinal or Neon Tetras. Just the same, I have kept topminnows and tiny fry of bass and Bluegills with Cardinal Tetras with no problems, providing I removed the fry before they grew much bigger than the tetras. Once I made the mistake of putting some darters in with my tetras. The tetras disappeared, except for one, which was shredded. Some of our native killies are also quite prejudiced against foreign killies.

I guess every kind of tank has its drawbacks, but a community set-up--whether it contains only natives or a combination of natives and tropicals--can be a fascinating experience. While I have experimented chiefly with fishes from my own region, I'm sure that species from other regions would be just as interesting as denizens of community tanks.