

THE SOLE SURVIVOR: Spawning the Bowfin(!)

by Raymond Katula

The State of Florida is looking into spawning bowfins and other species commercially for aquarium use. A request from Florida led to discovery of this article in Vol. 1, #1 (Spring, 1973) of AMERICAN CURRENTS. The version you are reading here has been editorially modified from the original. Mr. Katula, originally from Wisconsin, was a member of NANFA from California until a few years ago. Anyone who knows him should put him in touch with NANFA.

The Bowfin is found in muddy marshlands, weed-grown rivers, and swamps. It is the only member of its genus; its closest relative is the Gar (Lepisosteus spp.). Bowfins are temperate-water fish, preferring temperatures from 50° to 75° F.

The Bowfin has a long, rippling dorsal fin, a very blunt snout, a big mouth, and small eyes. It is muddy-colored with a greenish sheen. It has ganoid scales. A major sex difference is that the male has a green-and-black eye spot at the base of the caudal fin. The female lacks the spot. These are large fishes reaching three feet. I suggest keeping immature specimens, unless you have a large aquarium to spare, complete with cover; they are jumpers.

I placed my fish in a well-planted tank and fed a variety of foods. Live fishes, frozen fish, dog food--you name it; the aquarist should have no trouble feeding this critter.

Breeding this species is an interesting experience. In late April, May, or early June, the male makes a nest in shallow water. After spawning, the male chases the female away. The male now takes over. Three days later, the young hatch. If you want to watch fatherhood in action, you can leave him with his young for about three months, but you may lose the young. I only keep the male with the young for a month. To feed the fry, try infusoria for two weeks, then brine shrimp, after which they can tackle young daphnia (after another two weeks). Finally they can be fed flake foods, live fry, and other fare.

In the wild, the male gathers his brood about him and brings them (sic) wherever he pleases. In August, he either chases them or eats them.

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Male's "sex spot"

