

SPAWNING THE SHARPTAIL GOBY (*Gobionellus hastatus*)

by Rodney Harper, Marietta, Georgia

I acquired several pairs of these interesting gobies, which occur in brackish water from North Carolina to Yucutan, on a recent collecting trip to my home in Bayou la Batre, Alabama. I found them inhabiting beer bottles along the bottom of a tidal ditch. They seemed to prefer Miller bottles, but I can't think of explaining why.

The water had a specific gravity of 1.018, and the water was fairly stagnant. The whole area was very weedy, and the bottom was very sticky.

I observed several empty periwinkle shells around the den, so that must have been the staple food in that pond.

I collected four pair in 30 minutes and bagged them separately. They did well in the bags for 48 hours.

Once I arrived home, I placed them in a 20-gallon-long tank with sand. The water had a specific gravity of 1.015. They inhabited the tank with a small colony of Dormitator maculatus. Within two or three hours, the 4" males had cornered the 7" Dormitators. At that point, I removed the Dormitators.

I placed five 4" flower pots in the tank. Soon after, a pair took over each pot.

These fish are easily sexed. The male will grow to 8-10". The dorsal fin on a mature male will stand 3" when extended. It will resemble a cockatoo headdress. The caudal will be spade-shaped, with three or four center rays extended 2-3" past the tail. This is where the name Sharptail originates. The females are mottled, and have no outstanding finnage. The maximum size I've seen is 3".

The courtship is spectacular. The male will court only one female. His colors intensify. He will turn a brilliant green, with violet and blue fields throughout the finnage.

The spawning takes place within a week.

The eggs may number 200-2,000 and are tightly packed into the flower pots. They are oblong, and hatch in three days at a temperature of 78°F. Both parents guard the eggs. Very seldom do parents molest the eggs or fry. The addition of tough killies, or of other gobies, will increase the attention given to the eggs and fry.

After four weeks, I remove the parents. The fry will eat newly hatched brine shrimp from the start. It would seem that they could not eat brine shrimp, but don't let their size fool you. They literally tear the shrimp apart.

The fry are slow-growing, and take a year to reach 2". Sexual maturity is usually at 3".

So far I've bred three generations, and I never tire of watching these fascinating fish.

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