

# Surprisingly Hardy Silversides

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by

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My interest in silversides began when I saw a picture of the brook silverside (*Labidesthes sicculus*) in a booklet called *An Introduction to Missouri Fishes* by William Pflieger and Lawrence C. Belusa. I was intrigued by the picture, which showed a translucent fish with a beaklike snout. I had to have a closer look.

brook silverside, *Labidesthes sicculus*  
© Joseph R. Tomelleri

Finding the silversides was easy as they were abundant in the Moreau River near Jefferson City, Missouri, but getting them home wasn't. Catching them with my seine was not difficult, but when I transferred them to my bucket they died within minutes. After several attempts I gave up, vowing to try again later.

Many weeks later I was on a quest searching for sunfish when I caught a 2-1/2 inch silverside. My first reaction was throw it back, but on a whim I tossed it into the Styrofoam container that I had brought to transport my "catch of the day." Continuing to search for sunnies, I forgot about the lone silverside. Later, when I was about to put a blackstripe topminnow into the Styro, I was shocked to see the silverside was still alive and well! In my excitement I shifted my priorities and looked for more silversides. I collected a couple more before calling it a day.

I kept those silversides in a 15-gallon long aquarium with an outside filter. I fed them fine flake food with an occasional supplement of frozen baby brine shrimp. Since they feed on plankton in nature, newly hatched brine shrimp or daphnia would be an appropriate diet. William Pflieger's *Fishes of Missouri* notes that they feed by sight.

My first silversides survived for several months, but

my second attempt at keeping them resulted in them staying alive for close to two years. I found that a larger swimming area, floating plants, and salt in the aquarium seemed to have a positive effect.

Although I never attempted to spawn my silversides, sources note that silversides spawn like medakas or

Celebes rainbows, with the female trailing a filament with eggs attached from her vent and depositing them on plants. Their

spawning behavior in the wild has been observed to occur when the water temperature reaches 20- 34°C.

In California, I've collected and kept inland silversides (*Menidia beryllina*). I lost very few of these silversides when I collected them, so they may be more hardy than the brook silverside. They survived in an aquarium for several months before I relocated them to an outside pond with no filtration, where they lived for close to a year. Peter Moyle in his book *Inland Fishes of California* notes that they were used as bait fish.

Several people have speculated as to why silversides are so hard to collect and keep. Many people have suggested keeping handling to a minimum, and not removing them from the water when transferring from stream to net to bucket to aquarium. From my experience, I believe just taking extra care when handling them helps. In the aquarium, plenty of surface area and swimming space with the addition of salt to the water is helpful.

Silversides seem fragile, but with careful handling and care, they are surprisingly hardy.

