

The Sole Survivor

by RAYMOND KATULA

I have studied an ugly, ill-tempered monster for a span of a couple of years. The fish I am referring to is the Bowfin, Amia calva, better known as the Dogfish. Over the span of man's evolution, the Bowfin has changed little. He has been gobbling little fishes for a long time, appearing with or before the first warm-blooded animals on Earth.

He has a long, rippling dorsal fin, a very blunt snout, a big mouth, and small eyes. The Bowfin is muddy colored with a greenish sheen and with its ganoid scales is very ugly.

The Bowfin is found in muddy marshlands, weed-grown rivers, and swamps. He is the only member of the species, its closest relative being the Gar, Lepisosteus sp., which is another nasty but with a long needlelike snout. Bowfins are temperate water fish, preferring temperatures from 50° to 75°.

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

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.

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 3 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 wherever he pleases. Comes August, he either chases them or eats them.

Further sex differences are that the male has a green and black eye spot at the base of the caudal fin, which the female lacks.

For being such an ugly, ill-tempered fish, he rivals the much touted tropical, the Angelfish, Pterophyllum eimeki, as a parent.

It just goes to show you how much better Natives can be !

