

CORYDORAS PYGMAEUS

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The pygmy catfish, as it is commonly known and for a good reason, it only grows to about 3cm. They have a gold body colour with three thick black lines marked horizontally on their body. The centre line extends halfway into their tail. They are easy to keep, easy to feed and easy to spawn, what more could one ask for in a fish. The female grows slightly larger than the male.

We were fortunate to obtain seven healthy pygmy catfish that were about one and a half years old and ready to spawn. There were three females and four males, a good ratio. These were placed into a clean tank that contained a sponge filter, Java moss, bare bottom and water that was neutral to slightly acid. The temperature was 25°C. They were fed alternately on white worms, daphnia, baby brine shrimp, trout pellets and tabimins. Not much at one feeding, making sure that the tank bottom was always free of uneaten food build up.

After only having them for six days we noticed some eggs in the Java moss; the following day there were more. As this was

the first time and we definitely wanted some fry we moved the adults into another tank. In this tank two days later we actually saw them spawning one morning. Only one female was laying eggs so she had the four males to herself. We were not sure if only one male was spawning with her or if they took turns as it was hard to tell them apart. She seemed to choose the male and then they would form the typical corydoras T-position and after one or two seconds one egg dropped into her pouch, formed by holding her ventral fins together. They then parted company and the female was off to find the right place to deposit her egg. She chose the tank walls or the Java moss. She layed only one egg at a time. This went on for most of the morning until about 40 eggs had been deposited in various parts of the tank.

We decided to move the adults again as this spawn looked better and in the original tank hydra was growing from feeding daphnia probably. In the tank they had just spawned in, no daphnia had been fed.

We moved the fry one at a time from the original tank with hydra, using a syringe to the tank where the eggs had just been layed, after the adults were removed. The fry were adjusted to the water and temperature before being released. Although we lost about 10 out of 32 we thought it better than leaving them in a tank full of hydra. The hydra tank was scrubbed up and water from another tank was placed in it and the adults were back where they began.

Meanwhile in the tank that now contained all the fry and eggs, the temperature was

27°C and with eggs on the glass at the front it was easy to watch their development. After two days the eggs went from a clear colour to having a dark spot in them. On the fourth day two spots that were eyes were noticeable and they began hatching. I was fortunate enough to see one hatch that was on the front of the tank. The head emerged first, followed by the body. There were small rest periods because it looked like hard work. I could see his little fins flapping madly trying to pull himself out the rest of the way from his egg shell. Gradually he succeeded to pull himself out, his fins still flapping madly. There was no way with his yolk sac that he could support himself no matter how much he frantically flapped his fins. Helplessly he spiralled headfirst down to the bottom of the tank floor. He wanted to swim around, but couldn't so after a minute or so he gave up. The yolk sac seemed to be the only thing that stops them from being free swimming straight away, as it is too much for the little fry to swim around with. However the yolk sac only takes 12 - 24 hours to be absorbed and the fry are free to move wherever they want. By then they seem quite content just to sit around.

After the yolk sac had been absorbed, feeding began. They were started on green water and micro worms. After the fry were one week old they began to be more active swimming up and down the sides of the tank and in midwater. They were also fed newly-hatched brine-shrimp after they were nine days old. A few small snails were added to the tank to clean up any left overs after the fry were five days old.

Meanwhile in the tank where the adults were they had again been spawning. The females seemed to take it in turns and one would spawn every two to three days at least. These hatched in the tank with them as we no longer wanted to move the adults again. The adults have so far not bothered the fry. The fry are nothing like the adults as they have thick vertical black stripes.

If you can obtain these fish they are certainly worth it. The only thing against them is their size, they really need to have a tank of their own as they are so small.

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