BREEDING BROCHIS SPLENDENS

by Andrew Boyd

It pays to keep your eyes open and don't always trust what you see written next to prices in aquarium shops. A while ago, Julie and I walked into a pet shop and bought three "Sailfin Bronze Catfish". At that time we were buying every *Corydoras* that we could lay our hands on but after reading Dr Burgess's "Complete Introduction to *Corydoras* and Related Catfishes", I had my suspicions that these were not *Corydoras* at all.

The three little catfishes were quite ragged. Their dorsal fins, fully as tall as their bodies, were tattered, as were their tails. Very skinny, they seemed on the verge of death.

Immediately, they were put on a strict diet of bottom-feeder tablets and as many tubifex worms as they could eat. Slowly, they picked up and we placed them in our *Corydoras* community tank, where they continued to grow.

Now, eleven months later, they are still not quite fully adult size. Dr Burgess mentions an expected standard length of 7-9 cm but our largest (the female) is only 5 cm long. We put this down to their early hardship.

As the males soon started to chase the female, we put them into their own tank, a 30 cm cube, where the temperature was 22° C and the water hardness 140 ppm. A major electrical storm arrived just at the right time, that night and early the next morning the fish spawned. Between 150 and 200 eggs were placed around the walls of the tank, on Java Fern, and on the sponge filter riser.

The adults were removed as soon as we were sure they had finished spawning. *Brochis* aren't the famous egg-eaters that *Corydoras paleatus* are, but we weren't taking any chances. The fry hatched four days later and were feeding two days after that. Microworms, newly hatched brine shrimp and powdered bottom-feeder tablets were provided. We tried to keep microworms available in the tank for 24 hours a day and performed a water change of 5% daily. The fry grew quickly.

At one month of age the youngsters, about 2 cm long, began to die off, the dead ones appearing bloated. This was shortly after we began to phase out live foods from their diet and we attributed the deaths to constipation, caused by the change of diet away from live foods. With this hurdle overcome, the survivors continued to grow and thrive and now, at two months of age, their average length is about 3 cm and they have begun to take on the emerald green colouring of their parents.

Surprisingly, this was the first time that *B. splendens* had been bred in the Society. We put this down to the fact that we had come across the first shipment of small *Brochis* to be seen in Canberra for quite a while. The only ones available prior to that were costly adults, presumably wild-caught. Ours were probably bred somewhere in South-East Asia. It is often a lot easier to breed many species from tank-bred specimens than from wild-caught stock.

Author's note: it is now some eighteen months since this spawning and my hypothesis seems to have held, for the only other *B. splendens* bred in the Society are descendants of those we reared. It must be similar to the case of the Angelfish (*Pterophyllum scalare*), where the first wild-caught specimens seemed impossible to spawn, until someone was lucky. From that first spawning are descended all the millions of Angelfish in our tanks today. We now have a breedable strain of *Brochis splendens*, which should continue into the future and ensure the survival of this great little catfish.