

THE BLACK RUBY BARB

by David Rentz

The last non-event of the 1988 Bicentennial must have been the breeding of the Black Ruby Barb, *Puntius nigrofasciatus*, in my spawning tank. This species is native to Sri Lanka. It is not difficult to find in the pet shops but is generally not very well displayed there. It is similar in many respects to the Tiger Barb but does not display the latter's nasty fin nipping habits. It is nearly the same size as the Tiger Barb. When in full colour, males are purplish-black with a faint trace of four dark vertical bars. These are more in evidence in the fish dealers' tanks, where the occupants are frightened and often out of condition. The male also has a bright pink nose. The fins are colourless except for the dorsal, which is purplish. Some males have a distinct ruby overcast to the body. Females are less colourful. They are dull yellow with four pronounced broad vertical bars and colourless fins. In size they range from 40-50mm.

The various texts suggest a breeding tank of about 15 gallons for these fish but I bred them in one half that size. The water was clean and fresh, slightly alkaline and heated to 27°C. Clean Java moss was added to cover just the bottom with a thin, loose layer. The pair had been resident in my community tank for well over a year and had been breeding amongst the Crypts on a number of occasions. It was only a matter of a few hours in the breeding tank before the chasing began. After 2 hours of chasing through the Java moss an abundance of eggs could be seen and the pair was removed to the community tank. About 36 hours later a large number of fry were seen clinging to the glass and feeding with micro-worms and dry food commenced. Within a week I was able to give them live baby brine shrimp. Growth is slow with these fish and some 3 months later the fry were only about half grown.

I was quite surprised to learn that this species had never been bred by a Society member previously. It is always available in the shops. Perhaps, because of its similar appearance to the Tiger Barb, it wears an equally bad reputation. I can assure readers that it has no bad characteristics and is a beautiful addition to any collection.

A word of warning: I raise my fry in sandless and usually plantless, bare glass tanks with internal sponge filters. I recently discovered, with the loss of half my 30-day Rosv barbs that the pH under such conditions is quick to go to the acidic side of things. One day the tank can look very good and healthy, the next a disaster. So one needs to keep up the water changes on even a bi-weekly basis. It only stands to reason that in such a closed system, with so much food going in and so much metabolism going on, that the water will quickly become acidic. It might even be a good idea to run a topless box filter, with some charcoal, in this situation. But water changes appear to be very critical. It's disheartening to go to all the trouble of breeding fish and then lose most of the fry to something as simple (and basic) as water changes.
