

TETRA TEARS

by Mike Owen

One could be forgiven for thinking at times, when reading TANK TALK, that all one had to do when breeding Tetras was to shove a pair in a tank overnight and "hey presto" next morning there would be plenty of eggs, and in a few days lots of little hungry mouths to feed. Well, if you've tried Tetras you have probably realised that it isn't quite that simple. In order to provide some encouragement to all of you failures out there I thought it timely to recall some of my own failures, which are far outnumbering the successes. Hopefully, by realising that everyone has failures and lots of them, particularly early on in their breeding experiences, you will not join the unfortunately large number who only stay in the hobby for a year or two.

While the title of this account of repeated failures is about Tetras (I preferred it to Egg-layer Blues), I might as well clear my conscience about some of the other reputedly easy egg-layers that I have failed with. Probably the most outstanding of these was with Zebra Danios. After finding Leopard Danios a breeze, I thought that Zebra Danios would be an easy 25 breeding points. So it was off to the shop and the purchase of 6 nice active Zebras. They looked fine in the large community tank, and pretty soon it was very obvious which were the males and females. After about 3 months I decided the time was ripe, certainly the female was!

The books were read, the breeding tank was prepared and into it the best looking male and female went. Well, after 3 days without a trace of interest between the two I gave in and returned them to the community tank. Four times I went through this exercise, I tried every permutation the manuals could come up with, but all to no avail. This was getting pretty ridiculous, after all, the books all implied that if you couldn't breed Danios then you might as well stick to Guppies (not that I'm knocking Guppies, they are one of my favourites). I even had the galling experience of seeing the fish I had tried to spawn in a special breeding tank, spawn in my community tank a couple of hours after they had been returned to it, with of course most of the tank's inhabitants being eager bystanders, ready to gobble up eggs as soon as they appeared.

I finally got those Zebra Danios to breed. after realising that they had been doing it so often in the community tank that they just didn't feel up to it every time I put them into the official spawning tank. It was only after an enforced separation for a couple of weeks that they were ready and willing for me.

Well, my main interest is Tetras (and *Corydoras*, but my failures there will have to wait for another article all of their own). Tetras are supposed to be harder, and one expects failures, but sometimes it is enough to think about switching to marines, so that you aren't expected to do any breeding. In fact I have had a reasonable amount of success with Tetras, with Glowlight, Silvertip, Black Neon, Serpae, Flame and Red Eye Tetras all succumbing to my skills (or luck). However, I've also tried Neon, Cardinal, Lemon, Red Phantom, Head and Tail Light, Dwarf Pencil, Kerri, Glass Bloodfin and Rummy Nose Tetras, all without success so far.

The identified problems have ranged from being unable to sex the fish to failure to keep fry alive, as well as in most cases a straightforward failure to get them to spawn for completely unknown reasons. One of the more embarrassing failures was with Lemon Tetras, with at least 3 attempts with what I was eventually told were 2 females. Just after I went out and purchased the required males, my females died during a tank catastrophe. I've not had the heart since to try with new Lemon Tetras.

Neon Tetras are considered to be one of the harder kinds to breed, or even to get to spawn. I have had them spawn FOUR times in a breeding tank, only to have all the eggs develop fungus, or to lose the fry within 3 or 4 days, the one time they hatched. I also had several attempts when no spawning took place at all. Again, I have seen Neon Tetras spawn several times in my community tank, surrounded by the expectant horde of hungry fish.

If Tetras are that much of a problem then why even bother, you may ask. Perhaps like many things in life, it is the successes that you end up remembering, rather than the failures. If you enjoy keeping fish (and if you don't then find something else to read) it is a great feeling to breed successfully a fish after the various problems have been overcome. Even the failures can often have some good come out of them. If you think about what might have been the cause of the failure, keep good notes (not my strong point unfortunately) and above all, TALK and pick the brains of those around the club who have been successful, then the proportion of failures will gradually decline.

Start out with some of the easier Tetras, rather than Cardinals or Rummy Nose. From my experience, choose species that are easy to tell male from female (the essential requirement) and which are more common and hence low in price in the shops. Low prices mean that they are most likely bred commercially in large numbers and hence, are both easier to breed and are acclimatised as a strain to tank spawning. In such a list one could include Glowlight, Flame, Silvertip and Red Eye Tetras, while for a first attempt at an egg-layer, Leopard and Zebra Danios are hard to beat. Just remember to separate the male and female for a couple of weeks though.

