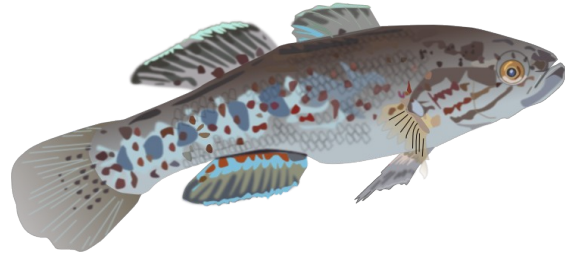


COLLECTING AT SCOTTS CREEK, NORTHERN TERRITORY

by David Wilson



The request was for a few fish to auction at the 1990 ANGFA Conference in Brisbane. A good place in the Darwin area, to find quite a lot of different species of fish together, is Scotts Creek. This is accessible by road on the eastern side of the Adelaide River, 5 km from the Arnhem Highway, north along the Woolnough Station Road.

About ten o'clock on Saturday morning, I picked up Kurt Bususto (a young aquarium fish enthusiast) for his first taste of collecting small native fishes. Within an hour out of Darwin we were travelling the last 5 km of corrugations, the only section of unsealed road on our journey.

Scotts Creek drains flat river plain in the Adelaide River System and during the wet season vast areas of country around this river are under shallow water. Unfortunately, the wet season this year (1989/90) has not been up to expectations, with about half of the usual rainfall (New South Wales and Queensland got our wet season, plus more). Normally, when the water spreads out over the flood plain, there are huge population explosions of all the fish and other aquatic creatures. At the end of the wet season, as the water recedes, all the creatures that have increased their populations are condensed into ever smaller areas, where predators and disease take a huge toll of the teeming thousands, leaving only the fittest to carry on when the wet returns (Charles Darwin told us about natural selection). Scotts Creek is such a place, where the small fish are condensed at this time of year (March).

When we arrived at the creek, about forty birds of the fish eating variety took off in all directions. There were about five birds perched on the sign which announced the existence of saltwater crocodiles in the vicinity. The birds were mostly Cormorants, with the odd Egret and a lone Jabiru Stork. Kurt and I had a few dips with the scoop net on the upstream side of the cement crossing, where the creek flows under the road through two small pipes. After a few scoops there were Delicate Blue-eyes, Black-striped Rainbowfish, Checkered Rainbowfish, Sailfin Perchlets, Penny Fish, Purple-spotted Gudgeons and juvenile Sleepycod in the bucket. We then tried a few dips of the scoop on the downstream side of the road, where the water was swiftly flowing through the pipes under the road. These pipes impeded the progress of fish movement upstream. There were huge schools of juvenile Rainbowfish, Perchlets, Penny Fish and adult Flyspeck Hardyheads in the backwater, just off the swift current. One dip of the scoop net was more than enough to catch some of the biggest Flyspeck Hardyheads that I've seen in the Northern Territory (I have seen bigger ones in Queensland).

The fish were placed in a 76-litre plastic garbage bin and rushed back to Darwin, before the heat of the day could cook them. When we arrived home only a couple of small Checkered Rainbowfish hadn't survived the journey.

Fishes collected in Scotts Creek at the end of the wet season usually have all manner of disease problems, which need treatment and quarantine before they can be mixed with fish from other locations. The Black-striped Rainbowfish (*Melanotaenia nigrans*) from this creek are very attractive, when compared to other populations of the species from around Darwin.

The water temperature, pH and hardness of the creek were not checked but from the colour (tea colour) of the water and the sensation from standing in it, a guess would be warm, acidic and soft. The aquatic vegetation was plentiful but I don't know which species of plants were represented.

All the fish made it to Brisbane but not all were sold at the ANGFA auction. Some of them were sent to the new National Aquarium at Canberra, by the ANGFA members in Brisbane.
