

BLUE DIAMOND TETRA, *Alestopetersius smykalai*

By Chase Klinesteker



Pair of African Blue Diamond Tetras (on UCN "Red List"), male on right

DESCRIPTION

The Blue Diamond Tetra at first appears similar to many South American tetras, but actually is from a river habitat in Nigeria, Africa. It is rarely seen in stores likely because it is difficult to breed, skittish, and ships poorly. It is an active fish that needs lots of open swim space, as well as darker areas of cover. It likes current and is easily frightened, and is a very fast swimmer that can jump, so keeping the tank covered is essential. The male is larger, more colorful, and has extensions on the dorsal and anal fins that are quite attractive. The stronger blue coloration seen on wild stock was not evident on my fish which were tank raised. There is a darker marking at the tail base and into the tail fin, but the main coloration of the body is silver-golden with some translucency. This fish is on the IUCN "Red List" as a vulnerable-threatened species in Nature, so it is important that we learn as much about it as possible, including its' propagation. It is quite peaceful and does best in larger tanks (it reaches 3 inches) with several others of its' own species. Being somewhat sensitive to water quality, regular water changes are recommended. The Blue Diamond Tetra has a hearty appetite and feeds mostly at the surface and mid tank. It will eat a variety of foods including frozen, live, and flake. It will do fine in medium-hard to soft water, but for breeding, soft acid water is needed.

BREEDING

Many references state that breeding of this fish is rare or unknown, but I had received a pair from Darrell Ullisch who bred them, and decided to give it a try. They scatter non-adhesive eggs. My setup included 100% rainwater, a mop and plastic plants, a box filter with peat moss, and ½ inch gravel on the bottom. It was located in a very low-light area of my fishroom where the temperature was 76 degrees. After a week and no eggs, I needed to change something, so I placed a heater in the tank and ran the temperature up to 84 degrees. After 2 days the pair laid several eggs which were found in the gravel. They were clear, hard to see, and quite large (1/8 inch diameter), reminding me of Congo Tetras (*Phenacogrammus interruptus*). The eggs were removed from the gravel by siphoning, rinsed, and put in clean rainwater with methylene blue and aerated. After a couple of days the eggs took on a whitish cast, indicating infertility, but continued to develop. It took about 5-6 days for them to hatch and another 4 or 5 before they started to swim freely. This spawn

produced only about a 20% hatch, resulting in 15 fry. A later spawn from this pair produced a 30-40% hatch rate and maybe 35 fry. This doesn't seem to be an overly prolific fish.

RAISING THE FRY

The newly hatched fry are long, slender, and translucent, quite difficult to see. At first they lie on the bottom, avoiding light as much as possible. After a few days, they attempt to start swimming with short jerks in a head-up position, resting much of the time. They are extremely spooky and at times it is difficult to tell that there are any fry at all! Their mouths are too small for microworms or baby brine shrimp, so they must be fed infusoria or suspended particle foods, and even after they start taking brine shrimp, it is hard to monitor them and determine if they are eating. In about a month, they are a little larger, and begin to venture out more. They are slow growers and may take 6-8 months to mature. For that reason, I am guessing they are a long-lived species, perhaps 5-10 years.