

FLAME TETRA, *Hyphessobrycon flammeus*

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Jan-Feb 2012



Pair of Orange Flame Tetras, male above

DESCRIPTION

The Flame Tetra, Red Tetra, or Tetra Von Rio, *Hyphessobrycon flammeus*, could be called an “ideal fish to keep” for many reasons. It is small, colorful, peaceful, easy to keep and breed, a good community fish, and will eat just about any foods offered. It was first brought into the hobby by C. Bruening in 1920 from slow rivers in Brazil near Rio De Janeiro South America, and was described in 1924 by George S. Meyers. Unfortunately, probably due to its proximity to populated areas, it is now locally endangered and export is prohibited. Yet it is in plentiful supply because it is easy to breed. This is a perfect fish for one to begin breeding tetras, one of the most popular groups of fishes sold in shops. The Flame Tetra can be strikingly colorful with brilliant red on the body and fins of the male and brownish orange on the rest of the body with 2 black vertical stripes. The female has some red and orange, but it is less intense. An Orange color variety usually costs about 1/3 more and has a brilliant orange contrasting with the red, but lacking the 2 vertical black stripes. Usually these fish are far from their best color when viewed in the shops. This is because they color up best when plants are present, they are in a school, and lighting is diffuse. Add soft, slightly acid, peat-stained water and they will knock your socks off!

BREEDING

Flame Tetras are peaceful, easy to care for, and make good community tank fish. Their maximum size is only about 1 ½ inches, so large and aggressive fish will not be compatible, but they are hearty eaters and will eat most all foods. In fact, I have found them slightly susceptible to overeating and getting fat. When this occurs, it is difficult to get them to do their exercises! One of their best attributes is that they are easy to breed. I have spawned them with success in both hard and soft water, although soft water gives a better hatch and survival rate. The setup can be as simple as a 2 gallon drum bowl, sponge filter, and plastic plants. Selecting a pair is easy since males are thinner with more intense coloring, and the females are fuller in body. Placed in clean water in the evening, they will usually spawn in the next day or 2. They will eat their eggs, so remove the parents as soon as they are done spawning. The eggs, usually around 100 to 300 tiny clear globules, are sensitive to light, so darken the tank and/or add a drop or 2 of methylene blue to prevent fungus. In 24 to 36 hours the eggs hatch, which often causes the water to become polluted, so I will siphon off the fry and place them in another container of clean water with similar chemistry and temperature. They are very tiny and hard to see, but swirling the water will allow the fry to be picked up in the center with a baster or siphon.

FEEDING

In 3 to 4 more days they will start to swim and begin eating. A few may take baby brine shrimp, but most will probably starve if that is all that is fed. I recommend to feed infusoria, Liquifry, or very fine dry food for the first 2 or 3 days so more fish will get a good start, then feed microworms or baby brine. The trick, however, is to not overfeed or pollution will kill the fry. They are so tiny that they do not consume much. Once the baby brine shrimp is fed, move the fry to a larger tank to give them room to grow. For 3 or 4 weeks, the fry will be light shy and hide up against the plants, bottom, and glass. Sometimes it is hard to determine if there are any fry at all! At this stage, some mild water circulation is necessary to carry the microworms or baby brine shrimp around the tank so the fry can eat, as they will not venture out. Within a month they will start venturing out more, and you may be surprised at how many Flame Tetras actually survived! At this point, growth is fairly rapid and they mature in 4-5 months. It is truly a delightful little fish that will enhance most any aquarium!