

RED HUMP EARTHEATER, *Geophagus steindachneri*

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, May-June 2004



Red Hump Eartheater Photo by Darrell Ullisch

FILTRATION FOR MESSY FISH

In October of 2002 I obtained eight 1\2 inch fry of *Geophagus steindachneri*. They were placed in a 20 gallon bare bottomed tank with a sponge-UG pan filter ("Spundergravel Filter"). This filter consists of a quart sherbet pan containing a standard sponge filter with large gravel over it (1\4 to 1\2 inch diameter). It works well for "messy" fish such as cory catfish and cichlids that root around the tank and keep debris suspended in the water. *Geophagus* are especially noted for doing that. The debris is pulled into the pan and under the gravel to stay there until the pan is removed and cleaned. But I digress.

CARE AND FEEDING

Some floating hornwort and weighted down anubias plants provided cover. The temperature of the tank was around 78 degrees. Water changes are important. Other tank inhabitants were six young *Melanotaenia duboulayi* rainbowfish as dither fish since the fry were very shy at first and other peaceful fish feeding made them more comfortable. The fish were fed dry food, frozen brine, and live foods and they ate very well and would often gorge themselves. The *Geophagus* would not come up to the surface to feed on dry food (bottom feeders), so I would wet the dry food and let it drop to the bottom. I did not use gravel in the tank as it could have hurt their mouths as they sifted through it, although fine sand would have worked well. They grew steadily but slowly, and in about 10 months at about 2 inches, they began to sex out. The dominate male was the largest fish and took control. He had more color, a larger head, somewhat longer fins, and would usually be first to the food, although he didn't seem to

stop the other fish from eating. I suspected that there were at least 2 other males in the group but they never developed the larger head, downturned mouth, and coloration of the dominant male. I didn't notice any of the other fish that were beat up or had shredded fins except the female that was carrying eggs. Sexing the other fish was somewhat difficult although the females seemed slightly smaller.

BREEDING

I did not see the spawning of these fish but noticed one of the smaller fish was being picked on and wasn't eating like the others. Closer inspection revealed a slightly deeper throat area meaning she was holding eggs. She was removed to a smaller tank with some plastic plants and large gravel on the bottom for the fry to hide in. This facilitated easier removal of the female once the fry were released. This was the females' first brood and only 12 fry were recovered. This species does not seem to be overly prolific, and was somewhat of a challenge to breed. The fry could eat newly hatched brine shrimp right away and had good appetites, but did not seem to grow very fast.

Geophagus steindachneri is a peaceful and interesting fish. Although it requires some special considerations, it is very worthwhile to keep and attempt to breed.