

SILVER BARB, GREENSTRIPE BARB, *Puntius vittatus*

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, July-Aug 2005

DESCRIPTION

Puntius vittatus, or Silver Barb is a small peaceful fish that is rarely seen in local shops, even though it is plentiful in the rice paddies of its' native India. Its maximum size is about 2 inches, which makes it ideal for small community tanks. It is very hardy and will tolerate a wide range of temperatures and water chemistry. It never nips fins, is easy to breed, has a long life expectancy (reported over 10 years), and will eat almost anything. It is a schooling fish that seldom gets sick. With all these attributes, the Silver Barb should be in great demand. "Then why", you might ask, "is it not often available in pet shops"? Although I feel that it is an attractive fish, it is not strikingly colorful, especially when compared with many other barbs available, and it may not sell well in the shops. Also, it is a very slow grower and takes many months to reach salable size, a disadvantage for commercial breeders.

AN OLD-TIME FAVORITE

I first heard about and saw a picture of *Puntius vittatus* back in the 1950s' (Yes, Virginia, there are people who can remember back that far!). It was in the book, "Exotic Aquarium Fishes" by William T. Innes. It was a fish that I thought I would like to keep some day. Little did I realize that it would be nearly 50 years before I first found this fish and was able to purchase some! A few years ago I found and bought 6 fish about ½ inch long, confirming their identity from reference books. Silver barbs have black dots on dorsal, caudal, and anal areas. The dorsal spot is more of a short stripe, which may be the reason for the name *vittatus* (striped). Young fish also have a striped appearance. They have no barbells but have the typical barb body shape. In top condition they are a flashy silver with a yellowish-green cast and a slight dark outline on each scale. I put the 6 fish in a community tank where I could feed them well and get good growth. Then I waited, and waited, and waited for them to mature so I might breed them. It took about a year for them to reach 1 ½ inch and begin breeding!

Feeding the Silver Barb is not difficult. They will eat almost anything, flake, frozen, or live. Just remember that they do not have large mouths. As for all barbs, I like to feed them some vegetable matter whether it is fresh, frozen, or spirulina flake. Their temperature requirement is a wide range, about 65 to 88 degrees. This is one fish that would do fine in an unheated aquarium.

BREEDING

Silver barbs are not easily sexed but the females are a bit rounder and the males are smaller and have a slightly more intense coloring. They breed in typical barb fashion, scattering eggs among plants. Fresh tapwater and temperatures around 75 to 80 degrees seem to work well. The female did not appear to fill up with eggs much, but she still laid over 200 eggs, which hatched in 2 days. The fry are quite tiny, but do not need much infusoria before they will take newly hatched brine shrimp. Growth is slow so there is no need to try and force it. Relax and enjoy the Silver Barb. It is an ideal fish for beginners. Few fish have more attributes and are as easily kept!