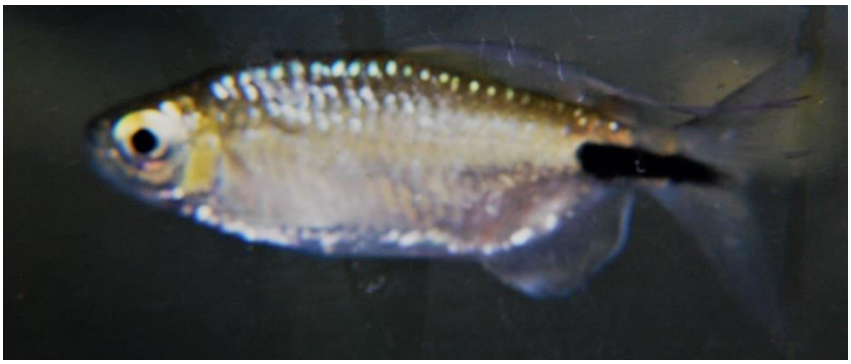
# AFRICAN LONGFINNED TETRA , Brycinus longipinnis

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, March/April, 1991



Male African Longfinned Tetra, Photo by Darrell Ullisch

**DESCRIPTION**

The African Longfinned Tetra, Brycinus longipinnis, is an active schooling fish related to the Congo Tetra. It has silvery sides and large scales with a subtle blue-green coloration. The eye is red, and the most prominent marking is a heavy horizontal black line on the side of the body from about ¾ back to the base of the tail. There also is a yellowish cast in the coloration, depending on the light angle and conditions. The dorsal fin of the male can be extremely long and flowing, often extending beyond the tail. Although it is not often seen in shops, the high activity, long flowing dorsal, attractive coloration, and peaceful nature make this fish very desirable in a community aquarium.

The Longfinned Tetra is from tropical West Africa and was first introduced to the hobby in 1928. Soft, slightly acid water is usually recommended, but not a necessity. It is large for a tetra, attaining about 4 ½ inches, although I have not seen them that large. Growth is fairly slow, and I suspect that it is a fairly long-lived fish. Water quality is important, as it is sensitive to nitrates, possibly even more so than its cousin, the Congo Tetra. Once in an established aquarium, there doesn't seem to be a problem, but I have found that they ship poorly unless there is plenty of room per fish in the bag. Their higher activity level probably consumes more oxygen than normal, and may be one reason they are not frequently imported. Because of their size and constant swimming, I would recommend a 30 gallon or larger tank for them with lots of open space. Clean, well oxygenated water and regular water changes are important. Several authors have recommended peat filtration, although I have not found that to be necessary. I suspect their natural habitat to be fast flowing rivers because of their streamlined body and constant swimming. 75 to 78 degrees seems to be a good temperature for them.

**FEEDING**

Brycinnus longipinnis swims in midwater and feeds mainly at the surface. Some cover or floating plants can be helpful as it can be timid or easily frightened, especially in smaller groups. They will eat just about any food, including dry food, frozen brine shrimp, daphnia, white worms, frozen beef liver, and beef heart. Some imported fish have been finicky about eating for me at first, but once they became adjusted, they did fine. Water quality seems to affect their appetite somewhat also. They can be extremely heavy eaters and seem to do best on a variety of high protein foods.

**SHARE BREEDING INFORMATION**

Most references I found stated that the African Longfinned Tetra had not been bred in captivity. Two sources from Europe, however, did refer to an occasional spawning but gave few details. If this fish has been bred at least a few times in the last 60 years since its introduction, I am disappointed that no information has been recorded in the reference literature. Perhaps the breeders felt the information unimportant, or did not wish to write an article, or even felt the "secret" might get them a few extra dollars when they sold the fry. I do not know the status of the African Longfinned Tetra in the wild, but the natural habitats of many fish we keep in the hobby are threatened by environmental damage or political unrest. If we do not share or publish the information on breeding difficult fish, they may become extinct or unavailable to the hobby. Whenever I see in reference books: "This species has been bred, but no details available", I wonder why. We are very fortunate in the Kalamazoo-Detroit area. SWAMAS has a very strong BAP program and a number of our presentations have been given by professional breeders very willing to share their knowledge.

**SPAWNING**

Darrell Ullisch gave me a pair of Brycinus longipinnis about a year and a half ago and I obtained 3 more specimens after that. Sexing adults is not difficult. The male is slightly larger, has the long dorsal fin extension, and has a convex anal fin. The females' anal fin is concave on the bottom edge. With 2 males and 3 females, I set out to try and condition them for spawning and get the females to fill with eggs. For the first few months they ate little and were concave in the belly area, probably a result of adjusting from the wild. Gradually they began eating more and more, but I could not get the females to fill with eggs. Finally, after feeding 2 to 3 times per day with beef liver, white worms, and frozen brine shrimp, I got one female to show a slight convexity, but certainly not a plumpness. The pair was about 2 ½ inches, so I set up a bare 10 gallon tank with fresh softened water (Culligan) and plastic plants in a dimly lit area with a temperature of about 75 degrees. The filter was a foam filter under gravel in a pan. After aging the water about 12 hours and knocking the bubbles off the plants, I introduced the pair of African Longfinned Tetras. For 3 days there was no activity and the fish hid in the plants. The fourth morning I got up and found 200 to 300 eggs scattered all over the bottom with no attempt by the parents to eat them. The eggs are large (2mm.) and very similar to Congo Tetra eggs. This spawning had a high fertility rate of about 80%. I removed the parents and siphoned off about half the eggs, placing them in rainwater with methylene blue in a dimly lit container with light aeration. The remaining eggs I left in the breeding tank and added methylene blue to control fungus, keeping the filter going strongly. Trying different conditions for hatching eggs can tell me what the best conditions are for hatching. In 4 days the eggs began to hatch and in 2 more days were all hatched. An excellent hatch was obtained under both conditions. In 4-5 more days I had about 200 free-swimming fry (lest you think this was a snap, I bred the same pair again two months later under what I thought were the same conditions, and got a very poor hatch of only 15 fry. Such is the fickleness of breeding fish!).

**FEEDING THE FRY**

The fry are slender, have small mouths, and need infusoria for 2-3 days before they will take newly hatched brine shrimp. A small amount of Liquifry 2-3 times per day was fed. The fry must constantly swim or they will sink, so it was necessary to use a strong air flow to the filter to keep the water moving and the oxygen content high. It also keeps the food in front of the fry continually. The slender fry have small stomachs at this point,

so use care not to overfeed and pollute the water. Once the fry are eating newly hatched brine shrimp, the job becomes easier. Just feed them often enough, as they digest their food quickly. In about 3 weeks they were taking finely ground dry food as well. I managed to spread the fry to other tanks quickly, and in 3 months had about 150 fry from 1 to1 ½ inches long. These fry fed quite aggressively in larger schools and will even attack sinking pellets on the bare bottomed tank, leaving little for the catfish or other slower fish. I have kept these fish with several other species of fish and have not noticed fin-nipping behavior at all.

**SUMMARY**

In Summary, the African Longfinned Tetra is a lively, peaceful, and attractive fish capable of being as popular and available as its cousin the Congo Tetra. I highly recommend it as a fine addition to any larger community tank. I encourage all hobbyists not to be afraid to try and breed difficult or previously unbred fish---you may have just the right conditions to obtain success. All fish breed, it's just that some haven't done so in captivity. Use common sense, clean water, and a variety of foods. Give it a try, and good luck. I may be reading your article in the near future!