

BLACK RUBY BARB, *Pethia nigrofasciata*

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, Sept-Oct 2005



Male Black Ruby Barb

DESCRIPTION

Barbs are in the family Cyprinidae, which includes barbs and rasboras. Barbs are a common food fish in many cultures around the world, including the common carp. They have a soft mobile mouth with their teeth in their throat. They have large scales, a bare head, and a forked tail. The Black Ruby Barb (*Pethia nigrofasciata*) is one of my favorite barbs. It is one of the most strikingly colored of all. The male has 3 wide black vertical bars on his side and a good sized jet-black dorsal fin. His face, gill, and chest area is a bright red in contrast to the black. During courtship and breeding, most of his body and fins are completely jet black with only his face being bright red. Females have the vertical bars but are less colorful than males. This is a fish that has been popular and around for many years, although it is not seen as much in the shops now as in the past. They reach about 2 ½ inches when full adults, with the male being slightly larger. They are not aggressive but almost shy and prefer to school with others of their own kind. They make a good show tank fish and are often seen in display tanks. Light green plants make a good background for this dark and flashy fish. In comfortable surroundings they are quite active.

CONDITIONS

Black Ruby Barbs come from slow moving streams or ponds in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) which are often shaded and have numerous plants. Clean, soft, and slightly acid water is best for them. They do not tolerate large swings in water chemistry or polluted water very well. Temperatures in their habitat average 68-72 degrees in the winter and 72- 79 in the summer. Breeding temperatures are around 78-82 degrees. They eat a wide variety of foods and have hearty appetites. I like to use a varied diet, but especially include some spirulina (vegetable) flakes. Do not overfeed them, as they have a tendency to get obese. The extra weight shortens their lives and can lead to sterility, and the greater amounts of food pollutes the water more. Their aquarium should have numerous plants, but also plenty of swimming room, so larger tanks work out better for this 2 ½ inch fish. Floating

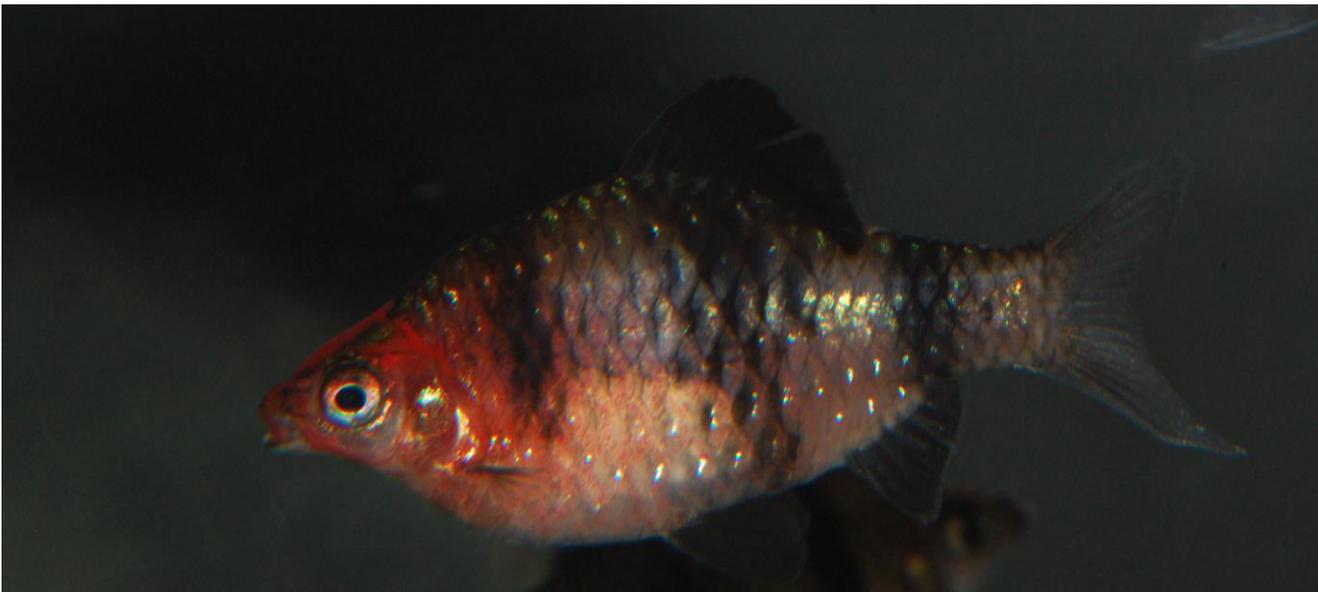
surface plants give them the security and shade that they seek in the wild. Older males can have a pronounced humpback, giving them a distinguished look, as with some cichlids. 2 or more males in a school will stimulate better coloration. Keeping a single fish in a community tank may result in some fin nipping. This is called the “Lone Barb Syndrome” because it doesn’t have others of its species to interact with and keep it occupied.

BREEDING

Breeding can be accomplished with some attention to detail. A planted 20 or more gallon tank is recommended. Java moss over a spawning grate can be used, as these fish are avid egg eaters! Just make sure the female can find some hiding places if the male gets too aggressive. Clean water about 80-82 degrees is good. The sexes should be isolated from each other and well conditioned for about a week. The pair is placed in the breeding tank in the evening and may spawn the next morning when the sun comes up, although many times it will take 1 or 2 days for the pair to adjust to their new surroundings. A somewhat subdued lighting is accomplished with floating plants. This may be important, as the eggs may be slightly light sensitive. It may take 2-3 hours for the pair to finish spawning and a female may lay from 100 to 500 eggs which are tiny, clear, and adhesive. Remove the breeding pair as soon as possible after spawning. Some breeders have recommended using clean old water to breed these fish. Probably the most important thing here is not to change the water chemistry too drastically. I once lost a nice breeding pair by moving them from an old established aquarium to a breeding tank with clean fresh (dechlorinated) tap water.

HATCHING AND RAISING

I like to remove at least some of the eggs and hatch them in a pan of RO water with methylene blue as an antifungal. Some species of barbs require softer water to hatch and this ensures that I will have a better chance of getting fry for the BAP. The eggs hatch in about 30 hours and become free swimming in about 5 days. The fry seem to hatch and survive better if they are not kept above 80 degrees. The fry are sensitive to pollution buildup and keeping the temperature stable and clean water for the first few weeks is important. I like to feed a combination of APR formula and some newly hatched brine shrimp. As soon as all the fry have orange bellies, you can stop the APR. Barbs are heavy feeders and these fry are no exception. With many fry, they should be moved to larger quarters with adequate water changes and filtration to avoid pollution buildup. Natural “cleaners” such as snails and daphnia can be added to help. As soon as they will take dry food, I would add some spirulina powder to their diet. Growth in the fry is fair but usually not fast, as they are long lived fish. A 2 ½ inch specimen is usually several years old, and has been raised under excellent conditions. Usually, 1 ½ or 2 inches is large for a Black Ruby Barb.



Male Black Ruby Barb with more intense color

Photo by Darrell Ullisch