

BLUE TETRA, BOEHLKEA FREDCOCHUI

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Blue Tetras

DESCRIPTION

The Blue Tetra, *Boehlkea fredcochui*, is a beautiful and very active fish that I have had kept many times over the years but had never spawned before. My experience in the past was that they were quite sensitive to water changes and susceptible to Ick. Because they are so active and need high oxygen in their water, they don't ship well and are not seen too often in the shops. When some showed up recently, I purchased a school of 7 to see what I could do with them. They are very colorful under the right conditions which I found to be highly oxygenated and planted tanks. I put them in a 10 gallon tank with much anubias, Najas grass, floating hornwort, and a thin layer of large gravel on the bottom to hide any eggs. About 1/3rd of the tank was left open for swimming. A sponge/gravel filter was working with lots of air and the temperature was about 77 degrees. They seemed very comfortable and colored up nicely in the darker surroundings. They liked to spend most of their time in the thick plants but would come out and swim some, especially for feeding. They eat most all foods and have good appetites. A variety of foods is important, including live foods.

The Blue tetra is an elongated fish with a forked tail. Its back is olive green with blue green flanks. There is a broad brilliant blue stripe from gills to the tail fin and the belly is a lighter blue. It is truly an attractive fish enhanced by its constant swimming activity. It comes from the Peruvian Amazon and was introduced into the U.S. in 1956. Another name for it is Cochus' Blue Tetra. Rarely longer than 2 inches, it has a life span of 3-7 years and is best kept in schools of 5 or more. A good temperature range is 72-82 degrees, and it probably does best in soft, acidic water, although my fish thrived and spawned in tap water from Lake Michigan. The sexes are determined mainly by the plumpness of the females in healthy fish. They are generally peaceful but may nip a long flowing fin or two.

BREEDING

Breeding them provided a bit of a challenge and a little luck. Much of the literature indicates that they have been bred, but no information was available (I cannot understand why some people don't share their knowledge to help others). I first noticed a few plump females so I increased the water changes and fed more live foods. My approach in this type of setup is to periodically siphon down into the gravel to see if any eggs could be retrieved. No dice! This continued for several months so I finally decided to set up a pair in a separate 10 gallon tank next to theirs. The setup was similar with the same tap water, gravel, and plants. I noticed that a male had jumped into this newly setup tank and looked happy, so the next day I put in a plump female to see what would happen. The following day she looked slimmer, so I excitedly got out my siphon and rummaged through the gravel. No eggs! What had happened? Could they have eaten them all? I repeated the siphon process with still no results. In frustration I siphoned a third time---and found 2 eggs! They were strongly adhesive! Further siphoning produced about 30 eggs which I split between tap water and RO to see which would get the best hatch, and the tap water won out. Sometimes I feel that fish are more adaptable to different water conditions than we think. The parents were removed from the spawning tank and it was left to see what would hatch.

RAISING FRY

The eggs were amber colored and hatched in 3 days. The tiny glasslike fry looked like tadpoles. When they became free-swimming, they were very slow and reclusive in their movements. In the 10 gallon tank I only thought I had a few fry, as the most I could see at any one time was 5 or 6. As it turned out, there were many hiding in the gravel and plants, and it was about a month before they started swimming in the open areas. This is surprising for a fish that is normally so active. The fry required several days to a week on infusoria and Liquifry before they would take baby brine shrimp. They fed in short, jerky movements, and would freeze still for several seconds if I moved close to the tank to observe them. They were very difficult to see, especially on the glass bottom of the tank. Once they started swimming in open water, they ate fine dry foods and grew quite quickly.

There were two factors that I think helped me to get them to spawn. First, when the male jumped into the breeding tank early, he had a chance to get accustomed to the environment and be ready for the female. The females of this species are just as aggressive, if not more so, than the males. Second, I had given up trying to soften, acidify, and condition water for the "ideal" water conditions mentioned in the literature for these fish. I think that good food, clean water, and live plants can do much to induce any fish to spawn. In conclusion, I feel that the Blue Tetra is a peaceful, beautiful, and active fish that is well worth the extra effort needed to keep and spawn.