

# GLOWLIGHT TETRA, AN IDEAL FISH

**Hemigrammus erythrozonus, SWAM May-June, 2012**

by Chase Klinesteker



Female Glowlight Tetra

## DESCRIPTION

The Glowlight Tetra, *Hemigrammus erythrozonus*, was the first tetra that I ever kept, back in the 1950s'. An older scientific name for them was *Hemigrammus gracillis*, meaning small and graceful. I believe it is an ideal fish to keep because it is active, colorful, hardy, peaceful, not fussy about foods, easily bred, and adaptable to most environments. It was first introduced into the aquarium trade in 1933 around the time of the neon tetra introduction, and they both have remained perennial favorites over the years. It was found in the Essequibo River in Guyana, South America. The Glowlight Tetra is colorful in a delicately subtle way. It has a large eye that is bright red on the top half. This color extends in a luminous golden-orange lateral line all the way to the base of the tail. The body is semi-translucent, giving this fish a soft and gentle appearance, which matches its disposition perfectly as one of the most peaceful of all tetras. They show their best color in aquariums where there is a school of them over a dark substrate and background and diffuse overhead lighting is used. If one wants to watch fish for relaxation, a tank of these beauties cannot be beat! Albino and gold varieties of this fish are available, although I prefer the natural color form. Often these fish appear washed-out in the pet shops because a lighter gravel and background is used. They have a 2-4 year lifespan.

The Glowlight Tetra reaches a maximum size of about 1 ½ inches and does best in community tanks with other small and peaceful fish. A group of 6 or more of them will make them more active and out in the open, as

they are a fairly tightly schooling fish. They come from waters that are slightly soft and acid but are tolerant of a much wider range of water parameters. 70 to 80 Degrees is a good temperature range for them. They are omnivores and eat a wide variety of foods, including flake. Their mouths are fairly small and they prefer to catch particles of food on the fly because they inhabit the mid and lower levels of the aquarium. Sexing them is easier as they become full adults. Females will be larger by about a third and they will have a rounder belly area. Males may have slightly more intense coloration, although that can vary with environment. If you catch them in a soft nylon net, males will usually stick to it because they have a small hook on their anal fin, sometimes needing a vigorous shaking to get them unstuck!

## **BREEDING**

Breeding the Glowlight Tetra is quite easy, as they often can be seen spawning in a community tank. In this situation the eggs are quickly eaten and few fry survive. It is best to have a separate breeding tank of 5 to 10 gallons set up so the parents can be removed after spawning. I have bred a pair of them in as small a space as a 1 gallon jar, although in that case, the eggs must be removed, washed, and placed in another container to hatch, as the small volume of water gets very polluted. Soft water, either rain or RO around 78 or 80 degrees, is used for breeding and hatching the eggs for the best results. Loose, soft plants like Myrophyllum, Najas grass, or plastic plants allow these fish to do their signature "barrel roll" breeding act, scattering about a dozen eggs among the plants at a time. An adult female can lay 200 or more slightly adhesive eggs in this manner. If you don't remove the parents after spawning, they will eat the eggs. The eggs are light-sensitive and will have a poor hatch rate if exposed to much light, so it is best to put the breeding tank in low light. They may even breed at night, as does the Cardinal Tetra. Peat or methylene blue treated water helps to cut down on light and protect the eggs. The eggs hatch in one day and the fry hang on the plants and sides of the tank for 4 or 5 more days. When they begin swimming freely, I recommend feeding small amounts of a liquid fry food for egg layers or make your own suspension of finely ground flake food by shaking it in water and letting the larger particles settle out before feeding with an eye dropper. Feed this sparingly 2 or 3 times a day, only a few drops at a time, and use light aeration to keep the particles moving in front of the fry. Adding snails and maybe some daphnia at this time helps reduce the pollution from the food. Partial water changes can be helpful at this time, but be sure it is the same temperature and chemistry. In 2-3 days try feeding a few newly hatched baby brine shrimp and see if most fry will eat them. If not, continue the suspended food another day or 2. If only a few of the tiny fry can take baby brine and that is all that is fed, those will get larger fast and begin cannibalizing their smaller brethren, resulting in far fewer fry surviving. Once they all are taking baby brine shrimp they begin growing fast and soon will be taking microworms and then fine flake food. In 2 months they may be  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 inch in size and showing good color.

I highly recommend a group of Glowlight Tetras for a smaller community tank. Their schooling behavior, peaceful disposition, and attractive coloration will enhance any display of fishes.



Pair of Glowlight Tetras, male above