

# **GOLDEN DWARF BARB, *Pethia gelius***

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, March-April 1993



Golden Dwarf Barb, Photo by Darrell Ullisch

## **DREAM FISH**

Since I began keeping and breeding tropical fish in the early '50s, the Golden Dwarf Barb had caught my interest. I "grew up" on W. T. Innes book "Exotic Aquarium Fishes" where it was pictured, and vowed that one of the fishes I would keep one day would be the Golden Dwarf Barb. Little did I realize that it would be over 35 years before I first saw and obtained this delightful little fish! I finally obtained 5 of them in 1991. This fish is seldom seen in the hobby. It comes from an out-of-the-way place in Central India that makes importation impractical. Besides that, it is not very prolific and an avid egg eater, so it is not often propagated by fish farms. Yet it is quite attractive, easily kept, and very peaceful. The pattern and color are very striking. Several large dark areas are interspersed over a golden translucent body, and the belly is bright silver. The fins are clear and barbels are not visible. In breeding color, the male turns a golden brown or copper color on top of this. They are extremely peaceful for barbs and even can be a bit shy. I would even trust them with bettas. Plant cover helps them feel at home and to stay in their best color.

## **COOL TEMPS**

Although the Golden Dwarf Barb will eat dry food, live and frozen foods will keep them in the best health. Just remember that they have a small mouth and need small sized foods. They rarely get more than 1 ½ inches long. Mine were breeding at less than an inch. They are not delicate, but will not tolerate heavier nitrate levels as some of the larger barbs will. They do tolerate cooler temperatures well and can be kept at 61-65 degrees for long periods of time. They are a schooling fish, and a group of 6-12 of them in a well planted, lighted, and unheated 10 gallon tank would make a very nice display.

## **BREEDING**

Breeding *Pethia gelius* is not difficult, but it takes some care in collecting and hatching the eggs and rearing the fry. Adult males have more slender bodies and darker, more intense coloration. It is best to separate the sexes and condition the breeders for about a week. Some references state that if this fish is bred at temperatures higher than 72 degrees, many of the eggs will not hatch. This I found to be true, since my fishroom water temperature does not go below 75 degrees, and I experienced a low hatch rate on the eggs (about 20%). I did not get spawns using an egg trap screen, probably due to their shyness. I bred a pair of them in a newly planted 10 gallon tank with small flint gravel substrate. By observing the fish I could tell when they were spawning. It took 2-3 days for the female to lay all her eggs. As far as I could see, only one egg was laid at a time. This gives them plenty of time to find and eat as many eggs as they can. They were spawned in Lake Michigan water that is 7.6 PH and medium hard. I usually collect the eggs from softwater species and hatch them in rainwater and methylene blue (PH 6.8). This presented a problem in a tank covered with fine gravel. It was solved by taking a small siphon hose (tied to a stick) and siphoning just above the gravel surface. This removed a few surface grains and the eggs (update: a clear cylinder gravel cleaner works well here). This was done several times over 3 days. The eggs and gravel were swirled in a clear plastic pan with the gravel pushed to the outside. The eggs concentrate in the center and can be easily seen with light from below, and are then picked up with an eye dropper. The eggs are very tiny and hatch in about 24 hours. When the fry become free-swimming, a couple of days on infusoria is recommended first, then newly hatched brine shrimp. The fry grow fairly slowly, partly due to their small adult size. A varied diet and plenty of room are recommended to raise them to adult size.

I highly recommend this barb for any hobbyist interested in an unusual, peaceful, and attractive fish for their collection.