

ORANGEFIN HALFBEAK: NOMORHAMPHUS EBRARDTII

SWAMAS Meeting, by Chase Klinesteker

PURPOSE

The purpose of a species discussion is to gather information from several different breeders about a particular fish that is popular or maybe difficult to keep and breed, helping others to try breeding them. The Orangefin Halfbeak, *Nomorhamphus ebrardtii*, was a good candidate to discuss. Several local aquarists acquired some at the ALA in Grand Rapids last spring. They were much in demand as demonstrated by the higher prices. Their behavior, habits, body shape, color, and difficulty in breeding and raising make them an interesting and challenging fish to keep. The first comment made was about their extreme ability to jump, and they are easily frightened.

HALFBEAKS

Halfbeaks are related to flying fish and needlefish. Most are egg-layers. They come from warm surface waters around the world, mostly coastal and brackish. Orangefin Halfbeaks are live-bearing freshwater surface feeders and very adept at catching surface insects and their own fry. Their lower jaw is longer than their upper jaw and their nostrils and eyes are at the top of their head, making it difficult for them to feed off the bottom. Their long slender bodies give them plenty of speed. They require a higher oxygen content in the water and are somewhat more sensitive to water chemistry changes and pollution. They can be very aggressive toward those of their own species, and keeping many in the same tank is difficult. Usually the "losers" will jump out and dry up on the floor if the tank is not tightly covered. One often doesn't notice because they "walk" all over the floor and are found in some dark corner. Females are much larger than males and will sometimes kill them.

FRY PREDATION

To reduce predation, lots of plants, especially floating, will help save some babies, but get them out as soon as possible. Orangefin Halfbeaks will take several days to adjust to an aquarium. They will eventually take dry food, but need frozen and live foods to reproduce and stay healthy. Several fry were kept with similar sized guppies to raise and the halfbeaks were not aggressive enough to get enough food to survive and grow. It was suggested that a species tank is best for them to grow out, and possibly crowding them somewhat to reduce aggression as is done with African cichlids. They love to eat blackworms, daphnia, and frozen brine shrimp. A worm feeder or eyedropper can help with this. Once they adjust, they will literally come up and attack the end of the eyedropper! A diet of frozen brine shrimp seems to enhance the orange color in their fins. They are not overly prolific, partly because they are so efficient at eating their babies. One breeder reported 14 fry saved from one litter. Halfbeaks are not long lived, and 3 years is considered good for many. Injury or damage to the lower jaw can occur if the tank is too small or there is little surface cover. An article by Mike Helwig on the Orangefin Halfbeak appeared in the May 2007 issue of TFH. Thanks to the SWMAS members who contributed to this informative discussion!