

CONGO TETRA, PHENACOGRAMMUS INTERRUPTUS



Fully mature male Congo Tetra

DESCRIPTION

The Congo Tetra is considered to be one of the most beautiful of all characins. They come from the Zaire River Basin of the Congo River in Africa. Their iridescent blue coloration, long flowing fins in the male, and peaceful disposition make it an ideal community tank fish. They are aggressive feeders at the surface and will eat a variety of foods, although they may nibble on soft plants if not fed some vegetable flakes. Males can reach 3 ½ inches with females slightly smaller, so plenty of open swimming room is needed. They come from soft, acid, peaty waters, and require clean water low in nitrates for best health and color. 75 to 80 degrees temperature is ideal. They are shy unless there is plant cover, diffuse light, and they are in a school. They can be excitable and will jump if spooked, so keep them covered. Their lifespan can be 5 or more years.

BREEDING

Congo Tetras are considered somewhat difficult to breed mostly due to their need for soft, acid water and the sensitivity to pollution. Some feel that if they are raised in hard water, they will be unable to spawn. My setup was a 10-gallon tank with undergravel filter of medium-hard tapwater that was treated with a peat moss box filter. Darken the tank and keep out of high traffic areas, as they can be shy in new surroundings. A grass mat or plants can be used on the bottom to hide the eggs. It took 7 days for the fish to adjust to the breeding tank, so one could possibly use a dither fish or 2 to help them feel more comfortable at first. After spawning, the large non-adhesive eggs were then removed and put in an aerated 2-gallon container of rain water treated with methylene blue for anti-fungal treatment and to decrease the light (their eggs are light-sensitive). There was only a 25% hatch rate. Having them spawn in soft acid water should result in a much better yield. The eggs take 4-6 days to hatch and need rinsing and fresh water 2 or 3 times because of infertile

eggs and eggshells polluting the water. When the fry become free-swimming, they can take newly-hatched brine shrimp, but growth is slow and they take 8 or more months to reach maturity. The fry can be slowly adjusted to harder water, but they are quite sensitive to large water chemistry or temperature changes.

In summary, the Congo Tetra is a stunningly beautiful fish that is peaceful and, for those willing to accept a challenge, well worth the extra effort to keep and breed.

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