



#### DWARF PENCIL TETRA

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These little pretty fish were always a favorite inhabitant of my community tank. They deserved my preferential treatment as they were the real backbone which covered my fishkeeping expenses bill. The electricity for tank heating was a pretty luxurious item in Czechoslovakia 25 years ago. That industrialized country charged citizens a lot for electricity bills. The money was not paid only for electricity but also for the already well-known problems of acid rain and river pollution. The cost comparison would be as high as 20 to 25 cents per 1 kwh.

But the *marginatus* was a rare fish which would bring equivalent of around \$5 per fish while being sold for \$10-12; this price would rule out any chance to conquer present

Australian markets and as the reproduction 'en masse' of this fish is out of the question, in this case Asian countries will never flood our markets in future.

Unfortunately, it seems to me, local hobbyists tend only to ride fashion waves, following one time Cichlids, then African Cichlids, now Australian Natives and later, god knows what. The result is that in the near future some of the recently bred natives will not be available because many of today's enthusiasts will run to ride another fashion wave.

This little pencil tetra is a very pretty fish indeed. Gold and black longitudinal stripes alongside the fishes body and red spots on the fins attracts the attention of anyone. The '*marginatus*' is a little bit shy and tends to move through dense planted corners. It hovers moving fins extremely fast and suddenly darts forward in a spectacular movements.

The fish originates from Venezuela and western Guayana in South America. It was imported to Europe a long time ago and as a very hardy, all eating fish, and always attracted a number of keen specialising hobbyists.

The fish, having a very small mouth consumes (and pollutes) little but I would not recommend it for a tank where adults Angels are kept.

The breeding pair selection is a problem, as they tend to spawn frequently in the thickets of plants and well conditioned females full of eggs, are a rare sight. The best way

is to separate a few males and then they show nice plump body very soon. One can observe a chain of eggs in the body when a light is held behind the fish.

Generally, this fish spawns readily but the most difficult task is to protect the released eggs from being eaten by the parents. Dense plants, Java Moss or something similar can serve you well, if the spawning is observed and fish taken out immediately after spawning but the spawning takes a long time, as one to three eggs only are released at each pass through the spawning medium. Both fish turn back then and eat the eggs and are ready for their next double pleasure.

The best approach to avoid these hobby horrors is to prepare a spawning tank with shallow water. Water level max 100mm, proper grating and twisted artificial fibres, forming narrow passages is the answer. The spawning medium passages do not allow fish to turn immediately for catching eggs sinking towards the grate. Considering a 'normal' production of 10-40 eggs, it is very easy to finish a successful spawning with no eggs left.

If everything worked, water was soft and acidic (5.8-6.5pH) the young '*marginatus*' hatches into black 3mm long fry, hanging on glass walls or plants. In five days they are swimming and should be fed in similar way as the other very small fry. They need small food for a few days longer but after that they story is similar to neons and pencil tetras.

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