

THE RAINBOW EMPEROR TETRA

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Most hobbyists have seen the beautiful Emperor Tetra (*Nematobrycon palmeri*), but very few would be familiar with the Rainbow Emperor Tetra (*N. amphioxus*).

What does it look like? The fish is very similar to the Emperor Tetra but the black body strip is wider. The main difference is the opalescent part of the black strip from mid to end of the body. The strong irradiant shine is reflective particularly when the stronger light hits the body. The fish behave, eats and is as tough as other tetras, it has another advantage to withstand very low pH values, which is particularly advantageous for small fry.

The fish was discovered not a very long time ago (if we can call 20 years a short time) in the Columbian Calima region in South America. Originally the collecting trip was to try to find new locations of the well known Emperor Tetra in the lower reaches of the San Juan River. With no success at this task, exploration of the tiny creeks in forests had taken place. In these creeks, the Rainbow Emperors were discovered and were always caught singularly or in pairs, never in schools, as it is common for most other tetra species. This rather individualistic behaviour in the community tank is frequently observed.

With my experience, of some time, of keeping this fish, there will never be a glut of this fish on the market, because the commercial viability, (breeding for profit), needs hundreds of fry from a spawning. One is lucky to obtain 10-30 eggs from a spawning and most of the eggs fungus quite quickly. One exceptional success can be considered with 30-40 fry given by a pair. The other problem is a very slow filling of the female with eggs, even when live food is constantly and abundantly supplied.

Added to these problems, Emperors are great jumpers. Having small spawning tanks side by side, it drives me mad when the male is visiting the third tank from the originally allocated tank. A cover to prevent these trips is an absolute necessity.

Also the males are very aggressive towards females, when confined into a small tank

(4-6 ltr). Once the female does not accept the spawning act, the constant brute force and attacking produces an exhausted female and usually ends up without fins and tail and most probably death from those injuries. This happens very quickly in a span of one or two days. The close observation of the behaviour is necessary.

The selection of the less aggressive male is essential. The eggs are light brown, hatching of fry in one to one and a half days and the fry mostly lay on the tank bottom and start to swim at five to six days old. They require small food for a few days but after that they take microworms very soon, which is a great advantage compared to feeding many other subspecies of Tetras.

It takes up to two months to develop the colouring of the fish which resembling the parents, but the typical rainbow shine is even slower to show.

The Rainbow Emperor is one of those fish which deserves to be bred by the amateur hobbyists and in doing this would guarantee the future availability of the stock for the hobby.

It seems to me the trendy hopping from species to species for the glory of a few cheap points scored in the breeding competitions or running to get a new species just for the sake of short lived excitement, miss out on the crucial point of keeping available more delicate species for the hobby in future.

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