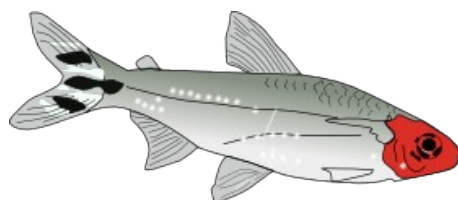


## BREEDING THE BEAUTIFUL RUMMY-NOSE TETRA

by Deborah Ralf



Put some Rummy-nose Tetras (*Hemigrammus rhodostomus*) into a well planted, slightly acidic tank, at a temperature of 26°C and you can expect to see the full beauty of this fish in a very short time. After settling into their new home they will soon become the main attraction. There are a couple of look-alikes. One, the False Rummy-nose (*Petitella georgiae*), does not have the full beauty, as it will not attain the scope of red colour on the head, and there is a relatively recent discovery, *Hemigrammus blekeri*, which is also very similar but is said to have the red on the head extending even further back. Our Rummy-nose fit the description of *H. rhodostomus*.

On one of our ventures to see what fish we could find to furnish a tank we had recently converted for display purposes, we chanced upon these little beauties. There were several in a small display and they were exactly what we were looking for. After some little persuasion (friendly of course), we had 6 young Rummy-nose to take home. They were probably about 2-3 months old at the time. A peaceful, well planted, 5' tank, with a temperature of 26°C and slightly acidic water, was their new abode and they did not take long to settle in. They hardly lost any of their colour at all. Some 6 months later we started to look at them from a different viewpoint: not just as pretty fish but as possible breeding stock, since they had now attained about the right age. By good luck, we had 3 males and 3 females.

An 18"x9" bare tank was cleaned with salty water and rinsed well. Tap water was added and the temperature was raised to 27°C. The pH was lowered to around 6.5 and a Diatom filter was put to work to give the water an extra going over. Some black-water extract was added and a mass of nylon was spread over the bottom of the tank. An air-stone set on low was the only other furnishing. The tank was covered with dark paper on all sides except the front and was then ready to receive a pair of Rummy-nose Tetras. Ever since we acquired these fish they had been given a varied diet, with at least one lot of live food per week. The sexes were easily told apart as the female was larger and more rotund.

After their weekly treat of live food, the fish were swimming contentedly around and it seemed the best time to select a pair for breeding, so all were caught and placed in a small tank for observation. The fullest female and the most colourful male were then chosen as candidates for the spawning tank and, after a week of acclimatisation, were transferred to it. Again, they survived the transfer with barely any loss of colour.

The front of the spawning tank was now covered, for it is known that eggs of this species are very light-sensitive, an indication perhaps that the fish lay in conditions of darkness.

Early following morning the fish had not spawned but a further inspection about mid-day told a different story. The pair had spawned and were well finished, for they were beginning to hunt down eggs for food. The pair were therefore

removed as quickly and carefully as possible. Their eggs were clear and quite large for tetras.

A quick peek the next morning revealed that most of the eggs had hatched. When the torch beam hit the hatchlings they hopped about madly, so viewing was kept to a minimum. The nylon was now carefully removed so the whole tank was theirs. Some green water infusoria and vinegar eels were added the next day, to provide food when needed without any danger of fouling the water.

2-3 days after hatching, the Rummy-nose fry were feeding and they were able to take newly hatched Brine shrimp and micro-worms fairly soon afterwards. Their tank was given small daily water changes, with water at about the same pH and temperature. We found it easiest to syphon water from the tank through an air-hose, with an air-stone attached, as in this way loss of fry could be avoided. Replacement water was introduced by the same means and a couple of very small Mystery snails were added as a clean-up crew.

The young Rummy-nose were kept in the darkened tank and grew fairly slowly for the first 3-4 weeks. Thereafter growth accelerated and the colours began to develop at about 4 weeks. Past experience has shown that fry placed in lighted tanks too early, before their colours are fully developed, go berserk and die quickly. However, if the lighting is increased gradually over several weeks, after about the 5th, there are no problems. At 2 months old, they are about 3 cm long and are ready to decorate a display tank.

We have not yet been able to raise large broods of Rummy-nose because of high death rates in the first few days but we shall keep trying different approaches in an effort to cut these losses. There seems to be no problem with achieving a spawning as we have been successful on several occasions, each time picking a pair at random from the community tank, but only about 10 or so fry have reached maturity from any given brood. At present we have about 20 very young ones coming along, from a run where we lowered the water level after hatching, to make it easier for the fry to find food.

Our previous young Rummy-nose are now in our lounge tank and are looking spectacular. They are certainly worth the extra fuss and are among the fish we prize most.

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