

# Year of the Rainbowfish

A monthly column about Rainbowfish by Derek Tustin

## Acquiring 'Bows'

When I sat down at the end of 2010 and decided to write a year's worth of columns on Rainbowfish, I mapped out pretty much the points I wanted to cover, and in what order I hoped to get to them. So far, I've managed to keep myself pretty much on track. This month I am going to share with you some stories about my personal acquisition of some of the different species of Rainbowfish that I keep. That being said, if I wrote this story back in January, it would be a lot different than the one you are about to read. In the past ten months, I managed to acquire five relatively new species from two different sources.

My intention isn't to brag, but rather to demonstrate that if you identify what you want and make an attempt to get it, you probably can succeed. It may take a bit of time, but with a bit of perseverance, the assistance of some friendly sorts, and a little bit of luck, it will usually work out.

### **The Fish From Syracuse, New York**

In late January of this year, I was surfing through the Rainbow-fish.org website (more on it next month), when I came across a post by Luca (his name on the boards), one of the members of that site. He posted;

*"I am getting rid of most all of my fish. I have some large groups of mature fish. I will NOT ship, pick-up in Syracuse, New York only. Arrangements can be made for meeting within an hour or so of Syracuse (Rochester, etc.). I would prefer that they go to someone that will breed, especially the G. pseudoincisus and G. ramuensis, rather than the Local Fish Store.*

*Melanotaenia boesemani*

*Glossolepis pseudoincisus*

*Glossolepis kabia*

*Melanotaenia australis*

*Glossolepis ramuensis*

PM [Personal Message] if interested.

Thanks,  
Luca"

Now I'm also a member of the Australia New Guinea Fish Association (ANGFA), and as a paid member receive their publication, **Fishes of Sahul**. In the first edition of 2009 there was an excellent article describing the difference between *Glossolepis multisquamata*



*Albino Glossolepis pseudoincisus ???*



*Glossolenis kabia*

and *Glossolepis kabia*. As mentioned, it was an extremely well written and informative article, but it was more of background information for me because I had never seen either species available for sale locally.

But now Luca was willing to sell some *G. kabia*. I had never acquired fish from across the Canada / US boarder before, and was unsure if I could even do so. My initial thought was that I could arrange with someone from the Tropical Fish Club of Erie County (TFCEC) to obtain the fish from Luca, transport them to one of the Canadian Association of Aquarium Club (CAOAC) meetings, and have a Durham Region Aquarium Society (DRAS) member bring them back.

But after sending a couple of e-mails to publically available contacts at TFCEC and receiving no reply, I realized that if I truly wanted these fish, I would need to drive out and pick them up.

For those of you not familiar with Syracuse, New York, it is a small city of about 150,000 located on the southeast shore of Lake Ontario. To drive there you can either go east from Durham Region and cross at Gananoque, Ontario and on to Syracuse, or you can go west and cross at Niagara Falls, Ontario and continue on. To go east would take about 5 hours, and to go west would take about 6 hours.

I PM'ed (which stands for Personal Message, a method of sending private communication on a forum or board) Luca and offered to make the drive. But fate intervened just a little bit. It turns out that on Saturday June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 he was heading to the Buffalo area for his in-law's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary and suggested that we meet at *That Fish Place* in Tonawanda, New York. Perfect. My drive had just been cut in half, and I would get to visit *That Fish Place* I had heard so much about.



*Glossolepis pseudoinciscus*

Now my primary interest was in the *G. kabia* that he was willing to sell to me, but Luca surprised me and offered me not only them, but some *Glossolepis pseudoinciscus* and some *Glossolepis ramuensis*. I knew about the *G. pseudoinciscus* (in fact Barry McKee from our club was keeping them), but knew nothing about the *G. ramuensis*. I pulled out my trusty books on Rainbowfish, did a bit of surfing online, and decided that *G. ramuensis* was another species that I would be interested in keeping.

So on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2011 my wife and I travelled across the border to Tonawanda (with a stop at *Target* for my wife – anyone else notice that women seem to love shopping in Niagara Falls?) and met up with Luca at *That Fish Place*. He had three 5-gallon pails, one for each of the species, and after paying I loaded them into my car and headed home. We were stopped at the border, but after a couple of conversations with some customs agents, we were on our way with no duty paid.



*Glossolenis ramuensis*

The moral of this story is that forums dedicated to a type of fish (or other interest for that matter) are an excellent way to gain exposure to others who hold similar interests. Participate in those forums, demonstrating that you know what you are talking about and are passionate about that interest, and you will make some friends who are willing to go that extra step to help you out.

## The Fish From Calgary, Alberta

My interaction with Luca was initiated by me. I saw his post and responded, and that response was in regards to something that he was trying to get rid of. The second story here is almost the exact opposite.

Most of you will remember that I was lucky enough to attend the 2008 COAOC Annual Convention in Edmonton, Alberta. It was a great experience, but what I best remember about the entire event was an entire segment of the fish keeping community in Canada that I had never had any contact with. During my tenure as Exchange Editor for **Tank Talk**, I had tried to establish an exchange program with both the Calgary Aquarium Society and the Edmonton Aquarium Society. I never received a response from either club and my interest and knowledge about fish keepers in western Canada had faded. But at the convention, I got to meet an entirely new group of people, many with the same passions as I, and gained a greater respect for the knowledge they possess.

As mentioned, I am a member of the Rainbow-fish.org forum, and have opted to have receipt of PM's e-mailed to me. On Friday, July 8<sup>th</sup>, I was working away when my smart phone vibrated, signalling the receipt of e-mail. I opened it up, and found that I had received an e-mail from Rainbowric, another member of the Rainbow-fish.org forum. The e-mail read;

*"Hello, my name is Ric and I live in Calgary, Alberta. I have been collecting and breeding Rainbows now for about 8 years. I currently have about 38 species. I noticed on your post that you have three very nice *Glossolepis* species as part of your collection. I have four *Glossolepis* species; *G. wanamensis* (from Jeff Burch in London, Ontario), *G. multisquamata* F2 (from Gary Lange), *G. doryti* F1 (also from Gary Lange) and *G. maculosus* "European Strain" (again from Gary Lange). I have had *G. kabia* (beautiful fish) about 6 or 7 years ago that I obtained from Kent Webster. Where did you obtain your group? As well *G. ramuensis*, definitely a rare fish here in North America. The weather has been pretty fine for shipping of eggs, is there any chance that you might wish to do some trading?"*

*Ric"*

Well, I was (and still am) interested, but not so much in trading, but more in actually getting offspring of my rarer species to others so they can breed them as well. Ric and I e-mailed back and forth, me explaining that space was tight and him providing me with a copy of his species list. Now before I go any further I should explain that there seems to be a weird reluctance on the part of many Rainbowfish keepers to actually provide a list of the different species they are keeping. I think some are worried about a list going public and then people contacting them at random to ask (beg?) for a specific species. I'm the opposite. My species list is attached to my signature every time I post on the forum, but for Ric to provide a list of the species he is keeping is a sign of trust in me, and a step towards building a good relationship.



*Melanotaenia maccullochi* "Skull Creek"

On Ric's list (and I don't think I'll be revealing too much about his list to the general public with the revelation of one species) was *Melanotaenia maccullochi* "Skull Creek". After reading through his list I e-mailed him back and told him I was actually very jealous of the species he had, especially the *M. maccullochi* "Skull Creek". He responded and offered me a small school in exchange for future eggs and/or fry of some of the different species I am keeping. And to further entice me, he also offered me a small school of *Glossolepis wanamensis*. Now *G. wanamensis* is another species that has long held my interest, but I honestly believe in

keeping only the species that I have room for and that I have time to care for. Accepting the *M. maccullochi* "Skull Creek" would fill up my last empty tank, and there was no way I could add another tank. Luckily Ric agreed to send me the *G. wanamensis* for another DRAS club member if I could find someone I trusted, knew would care for the species and would breed them. So after a few phone calls, I found a home for them with Barry McKee.

About a week later Ric arranged to have them shipped to me. This was my first experience with receiving fish in the mail, and I took the day off work anxiously anticipating their arrival. We had coordinated so that they arrived on September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011, the day of DRAS's first meeting of the new club year. They arrived packed in a Styrofoam box. I immediately began acclimatizing the *M. maccullochi* "Skull Creek" and later that evening delivered the *G. wanamensis* to Barry McKee.



*Glossolepis wanamensis*

So the moral of this story is that participation to the forums can lead others to realize what you have, and others may be willing to swap what you have for what they have. A quid pro quo like the one I have with Ric now places the onus on me to return the favour with species that I have, and encourages me to proactively breed to meet my end of the bargain.

## ***The Fish from Belgium***

As much as I am enthralled with the *Glossolepis kabia*, *G. ramuensis*, *G. pseudoinciscus* and *Melanotaenia maccullochi* "Skull Creek" that I have managed to acquire, I would willingly give them all up if I had to choose between all of them and one other species that I am keeping. Parts of this story have been shared by Klaus Steinhaus in his discussions regarding the C.A.R.E.S. Preservation Program, and I've mentioned others parts to fellow club members, but this is the first time I am sharing the entire story.

I'm a list maker. Always have been, always will be. Sometimes I make written lists, sometimes I make visual lists. I find it helps me. When I first started getting interested and involved in Rainbowfish, I did some research using Adrian Tappin's website (again, more information on this next month) as a starting point, and made myself a top ten list of Rainbow species I would like to keep. At that time, I didn't know about which species were available and which weren't, and I just listed what I liked. As I got more involved and did more research, I came to realize that one particular species that I really wanted to keep, *Melanotaenia oktediensis* was basically impossible to find.

But I'm stubborn and kept tabs on what was happening with these species, occasionally running a Google search to see if there was any news. There never was, and over the years they remained impossible to find.

In mid-2009, Klaus Steinhaus, then president of the Durham Region Aquarium Society, introduced the club to the C.A.R.E.S. Preservation Program, and I found that *M. oktediensis* was listed on the C.A.R.E.S. Priority. I was ecstatic, thinking that by its presence on the list someone, somewhere, was keeping it. Unfortunately, after contacting Claudia Dickinson, the C.A.R.E.S. Preservation Program Coordinator at the suggestion of Klaus, I found out that no one was in fact keeping this species.

I took my search on-line and in a post on Rainbowfish.info (another web forum that I will be addressing next month) asked if anyone was keeping this fish. I found that two people, Marcel Dielen and Johannes Graf, were keeping them. I PM'ed Johannes and he offered to send me fry once his pair started breeding. However, in a follow-up a couple of months later he informed me that he lost one of the adults. He then

approached Marcel on my behalf (Marcel speaks no English and I speak no German and my French is pitiful) and found out that Marcel had fry and that he would be willing to provide me with some. So this started me on... well let's call it an adventure...

Or perhaps it would be better to call it a global adventure. Marcel lives in Belgium, Johannes is in Germany, and I'm in Canada. The first hurdle was figuring out how to get fish into my tank that were at the time housed half a world away.

I contacted Claudia Dickinson, the C.A.R.E.S. Preservation Program Coordinator for suggestions and any assistance she could provide. She in turn put me in contact with Anton Lamboj, one of the C.A.R.E.S. Program Specialists. Anton lives in Austria, and agreed to carry the fish over the Atlantic when next he came.

It turned out that Anton was coming over to attend the 2010 American Cichlid Association annual convention in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin in July of that year. However, he would first be making a stop in Toronto to visit friends. Johannes had informed me that fry would be available in July or August. I went back to Johannes who contacted Marcel and informed that fry would be indeed be available in time for Anton's trip.

Marcel (in Belgium) provided the fry to a friend of his named Joel. Joel hand delivered them to Johannes in Germany. Johannes then had them couriered to Anton in Austria (for which I reimbursed him – PayPal is a wonderful thing...) Anton in turn put them in his luggage and on July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010 personally handed them to me at Pearson International Airport in Toronto, Ontario.

The moral of this story is really the simplest of all... If you don't try, you will never succeed. It took a bit (okay, a lot) of effort on my part to track them down, and I was sending e-mails fast and furious to figure out the best way to accomplish my goal, but in the end all that effort was worthwhile. While I received twelve fish, only five of them (two males and three females) survived to maturity. However, I have managed to successfully breed them this past summer in my pond. They are not prolific and the fry experienced a high mortality rate, but I have managed to keep eleven fry going. Careful water maintenance and frequent feeding of excellent quality food has kept them alive and growing.

You will note that I have never mentioned how much I paid for any of these fish. The reason behind that is simple. You need to establish your own relationship with the people that you want to buy / trade fish from. The value of the fish are based on the desire of the person acquiring them and the assessment of their value by the person selling them. If you establish yourself as knowledgeable and dedicated, it is highly likely that you will not pay the highest price possible. With the people I have been dealing with in acquiring my rarer species, I have paid a fair price, but it is certainly less than what they could have charged me, and a large part of that is because I established a relationship with them.

I often am envious of the individuals who are able to travel to someplace and gather something that holds their interest. But I have found that I can collect from home. Indeed, even the rarest of fish may be available to you if you make the right contacts. All it takes is some effort to reach out to others, and to demonstrate a true passion for the fish you wish to acquire.



*Melanotaenia oktediensis*