

# DAWN TETRA, *Aphyocharax nattereri*

by Chase Klinesteker SWAM, March/April, 1995



Male Dawn Tetra, Photo by Darrell Ullisch

## DESCRIPTION

The Dawn Tetra, *Aphyocharax nattereri* is a small rarely seen characin that is quite attractive. It has a blueish-green coloration with a very prominent black spot at the base of the tail with white edging above and below. Also prominent is a black vent spot at the base of the anal fin, which has a contrasting white spot below it. The male is slimmer and has a black edge to the long anal fin. This is especially noticeable when he is in breeding coloration. Maximum size is about 1 ½ inches, and since it is so slender, diminutive might be used to describe it. However, do not feel sorry for, or be too protective of this fish. It has the nasty habit of nipping fins, often of fish much larger than itself, and it is an extremely fast swimmer. The courting display by the male involves extremely fast and precise swimming and is a treat to watch. If this fish were the size of a steelhead trout, it would be a world-class fighting gamefish! Needless to say, cover their tank tightly, as it is also an excellent jumper. Contrasting with the swimming ability of the Dawn Tetra is its usual behavior of sitting and resting in the plants. They seem to be “loners” most of the time, even the tiny fry will sit in and on the plants, scattered around the tank. For this reason I recommend fairly heavy plant growth in their aquarium, which seems to eliminate most of the fin nipping. Dawn Tetras will eat a variety of foods. They seem to do best on meaty foods such as brine shrimp or beef heart.

## SPAWNING

Females will fill with eggs so there is a very noticeable difference between the sexes. For spawning, I put the pair in a heavily planted 20 gallon long tank with Grand Rapids tap water (PH 7.8, medium hardness). This seemed to me to be far too large a tank for this small a fish, but it was the only tank available at the time. Looking back, the larger tank may have been necessary for this fast-swimming fish to spawn. I was lucky enough to observe them spawning, and at times I could not locate where the male had gone, he swam so fast and far! Afterward, I siphoned some of the eggs from the gravel and plants and placed them in rain water with methylene blue for hatching, as I do when I breed most tetras. I was very surprised when none of the eggs hatched in the rainwater. I had removed the pair from the spawning tank, so I decided to let it set to see if any fry would hatch there. After about 1 ½ weeks I was not finding fry and was getting ready to put other fish in the tank, when I noticed a very tiny fry swim for cover when I moved a plant leaf at the surface. I could

only find a few fry. They were smaller than rainbow fry and translucent. After another week on infusoria, they began taking baby brine shrimp. The fry seemed to hide in the surface plant leaves, attracted to the light. The low aeration and live plants seemed to supply enough natural infusoria to allow these fry to survive. I did raise 10 fry to receive Breeders Award Points for this fish, but there is still much to be learned about spawning and raising this highly unusual tetra. Although there is a report of the Dawn Tetra being spawned in Germany (Baensch Atlas), Darrell Ullisch tells me this may be the first recorded spawn in the United States.