

Three Stripes and it Croaks

by BERNARD HARRIGAN

The Three-stripe Gourami, *Trichopsis schalleri*, is a scarce little gourami that was once thought to be a subspecies of *T. vittatus*, the Croaking Gourami. Although it has been in the hobby since the early 60s, it is the least known and hardest to find of the "Croaking Gourami Group," consisting of *T. schalleri*, the aforementioned *T. vittatus*, and AI ("Anabantoid Man") Priest's personal favorite, *T. pumila*, the Sparkling Gourami. (AI wrote a wonderful article on them in the January 2003 edition of Modern Aquarium.) All three of these species could be (but shouldn't be) cross-bred.

From the Mekong Basin region in Southeast Asia, they can be found swimming in marshes, swamps, and rice fields. Its maximum size is around 2.5 inches. *T. schalleri* has a subtle beauty with a basic tan body and darker stripes going horizontally from the eye to the caudal peduncle. The dorsal, caudal, and anal fins are trimmed in red with numerous shimmering baby blue spots. As compared with the female, the fins of the male are generally longer with flowing extensions. Only in a well planted tank will they feel comfortable enough to fully color up and show off.

They can be kept in a small tank, 5½ or 10 gallon, with a pH of 6.7, soft to medium hardness (hard water is a no-no), and a temperature range of 72° to 82°F. Although more sensitive than its two cousins, *T. schalleri* is not a difficult fish to keep, but it's a fish that will not tolerate neglect.

Breeding is generally triggered by feeding generously with live food, especially mosquito larvae. Lower the water level to about six inches, soften the water, and raise the temperature to 86°F.

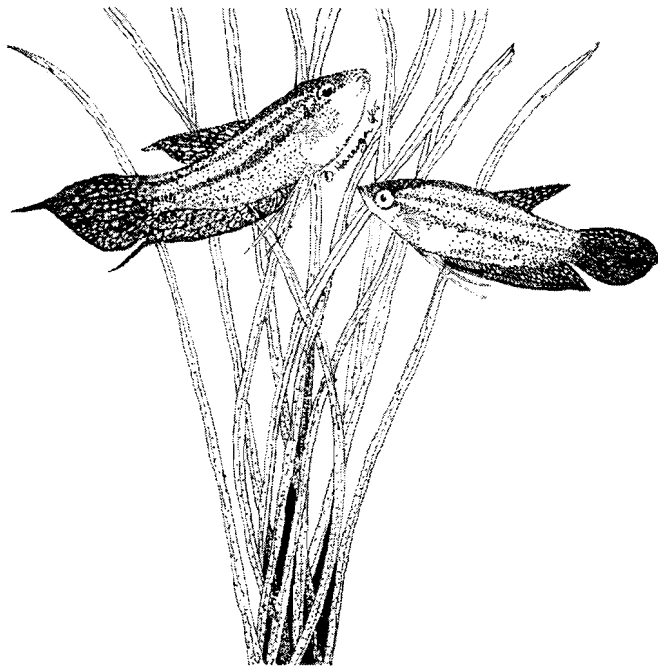
Schalleri breed in typical bubble-nest fashion. The male builds a tiny nest, usually under a leaf. The egg-laden female will swim in front of the male and wait for his embrace. The male wraps his body around the female, tightly hugging her, squeezing her, and "croaking" until she drops her packet of eggs. She seems to be in an enraptured state of immobility as she drifts down to the bottom. The male quickly retrieves the eggs and deposits them into the bubble-nest. Croaking noises can be heard throughout this courtship.

Before the end of the next day, the fry will hatch out. Around 72 hours after that, their yolk sac is

depleted, they are hungry, and looking for food. At this point, the parents can be removed, since they have stopped looking after their young and their presence will only tax the quality of the water.

The mouths of the babies are so small that only the tiniest of foods (green water, infusoria, plankton, etc.) can be eaten. Make sure cultures are already established at this point. If not, hopefully the aquarium has enough plants to provide the amount of microfauna needed. The addition of Java Moss taken from another tank could insure their survival. Make sure you have your brine shrimp hatchery going, because three days after they are free-swimming, the fry are ready for artemia nauplii.

Although *T. schalleri* is not a fish for a beginner, there's no reason why anyone in the club who practices good aquarium husbandry couldn't keep and hopefully spawn this elusive Asian gem.



Trichopsis schalleri – The Three-stripe Gourami
drawing by Bernard Harrigan

