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Breeding The Drapefin Barb

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The Drapefin Barb is a rare and beautiful fish from India that is occasionally seen in stores. Its beauty lies in the long, broad dorsal fin of the male, which is colored with black and yellow markings. The top edge of the dorsal is edged in black and the remainder is a delicate yellow and black lace pattern throughout. The large metallic scales on the body are edged with black. There is a large black spot at the base of the tail. When displaying to a female, an adult male's dorsal can be almost as large as his body! They are called "drapefin" because when not displaying, the dorsal is so long and heavy that it drapes down alongside the body. The female has a short rounded dorsal fin that is tipped with a black spot and yellow beneath. Females are only about two-thirds the size of males. The largest male I have had was about 2-inches long. Other names for this fish are "Highfin Headstander" and "Diamond Barb-Highfin Variable".

I have not been able to find a picture of the Drapefin Barb in any of the reference books that I have, but some information was located on the Internet. The scientific name given in one reference was *Oreochthys umangii*. I contacted Dr. Stan Weitzman to see if he had any more information. He does not know of any study confirming that name. He mentioned that "*Oreochthys umangii*" is an invalid name and may have been created by an exporter in Asia, a common practice. The best reference he could find was as "*Oreochthys sp.*" in "*Aquarien Atlas*" band 6, available only in German. Several recent imports from this region appear closely related to *Oreochthys cosuatis* and may be a new species or just geographical varieties. Most likely it is a new undescribed species from Northern India.

No reference to breeding was found. This fish is somewhat difficult to keep due to its sensitivity to pollutants in the water and changes in water chemistry. It does best at around 75 to 80 degrees F. It will eat a variety of foods, but it is a slow, deliberate eater. I have fed them flake food, frozen brine shrimp, baby brine shrimp, daphnia, and microworms. Being barbs, I feed some spirulina flake food to give them vegetable matter in their diet. Tanks with no gravel seem to work best, since uneaten food can be removed easily to avoid waste buildup. They inhabit the bottom layer of the tank and reluctantly come to the surface to feed. Sometimes a peaceful "dither fish" or two is necessary to get them eating better. Water chemistry changes are not recommended but regular water changes are essential.

I have kept this fish several times over the last few years. It seems that there is a predominance of males in the stock available, some of them late in developing the drapefin, and they appear at first as females. They seem to be

short lived, as I have never kept one longer than about one and one-half years, although their sensitivity may play a part in that. A simple water change along with a filter cleaning may stress them enough to cause death. In a manner similar to the *Apistogramma* species, they appear to be gasping, then lose balance and spin around in a disoriented manner. I only have noticed this with adult fish, especially males. The young are much more resilient. The Drapefin Barb is a very shy fish. They seem to do best in a single species tank as a small group. Don't put them in with very active fish or they will stay hidden and not eat well.

Their breeding behavior is very interesting. I have observed two males locking jaws and wrestling in the manner of cichlids. I have also seen two females do this, but not a pair. They tightly lock jaws and thrash about while swimming up towards the surface, then let go. It likely is the way they establish dominance. Males will also spread fins and dance in front of each other, but rarely is there any damage done. This is an awesome display! When eggs are laid, it is similar to most barbs except that the male is not very aggressive and will not harm the female (he is slower with his long heavy dorsal). Only a single tiny clear egg is laid each time and only a few times each day. Eggs will be laid wherever the fish are, even in the open or against the glass. They probably are efficient egg eaters also. From two pairs I would average collecting only one to five eggs every two days. They are not prolific breeders!

I had read about this fish needing soft acid water for breeding, so I slowly acclimated a pair and collected a few eggs. Most did not hatch but I did raise a few fry. Unfortunately, the pair died from the stress of the water chemistry change. I have learned from past experience that fish are variable. In fact, through experimentation, I found out that these fish did better in tap water with a few seashells added! I now hatch the eggs in tap water with nearly one hundred percent hatch rate. Whenever trying to breed new or difficult fish, always keep all options open!

The breeding tank was a 20-gallon long with a bare bottom, a pan (sponge-gravel) filter, two potted plants, and some floating Hornwort. A section of plastic doormat "grass" was placed under the pots for an area to collect the eggs. A small trio of surface dwelling livebearers was added for dither fish along with the two pair of Drapefin Barbs. Tank temperature was 75 – 78 degrees. Every two days the mat, filter, and potted plants were removed and the accumulated debris(along with the eggs) was gently swept to one end and siphoned out. The mat, plants, and pan were then replaced. The debris was concentrated and examined in a clear pan with a light below to locate the tiny clear non-adhesive eggs. The eggs were removed with an eyedropper and placed in a quart pan in tap water with methylene blue. The eggs hatch in about two days and the fry become free swimming about five days after that. It took about a week or more to get ten to fifteen fry. I expect that there is a more efficient method of collecting the eggs or getting more fry!

The fry were placed in a container with snails and some daphnia to assure the best water clarity. Light aeration was used and they were fed *APR* for three

days before beginning baby brine shrimp and microworms. Only small amounts of these foods were given, with water changes and siphoning debris helping to control pollution. Fry growth was good with them reaching 1/2-inch after two months. Care must be taken in bagging and transporting this fish.

The Drapefin Barb is a beautiful and unusual fish that requires some extra care to keep and breed. The challenge and enjoyment of keeping it are very much worth the effort!