

Badis ruber

“A small fish with a BIG attitude!”

by ALEXANDER A. PRIEST

The family Badidae is made up of small freshwater fishes that are closely related to the leaffishes (family: Nandidae). Both families are often classified as a “labyrinth fish” (refer to [Aqualog: All Labyrinths](#)¹), even though their member species lack a labyrinth organ. However, it is generally believed that they share a common evolutionary ancestor with the “true” labyrinth fishes (bettas, gouramis, snakeheads, ctenopomas, etc.). In 2002, Drs. Sven Kullander (Swedish Museum of Natural History, Stockholm) and Ralf Britz (University of Tbingen, Germany) revised the family Badidae, and added a new genus, *Dario*². Since then, more species have been added to each of the genera *Badis* and *Dario*.

Badis ruber (formerly known as *Badis burmanicus*, or by the common names “Burmese Badis” and “Burma Chameleon Fish”) is native to the slow flowing streams or ditches in southern Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) and the middle Mekong River drainage in Thailand.

They are a relatively small fish (both males and females rarely reaching 2.5 inches total length), with a big attitude (in fact, the *Badis* were originally thought to be cichlids!). They can be very territorial among themselves, with males often fighting to the death. While the [Baensch Aquarium Atlas](#) states that this is a “Peaceful fish, it is even less territorial than *Badis badis badis*”³ this has not been my experience. Of the *Badis* and *Dario* species I have kept, I would say that males of this species are among the most aggressive towards other male members of its own species. Because of their small size, they can be kept in relatively small tanks, but it is important that the tank have hiding spaces and enough plants and caves to provide multiple distinct territories. They will stay in hiding most of the time, generally in the lower third of the tank, coming out only to eat.

These fish are cave spawners, and prefer a dimly lit tank. Therefore, I was never able to witness the actual spawning ritual. I only know that spawning did not occur until after the dominant male had disposed of all his rivals. My *Badis ruber* spawned in a tank having a few small caves, a sponge filter, and without a separate heater. Therefore, the tank water was room temperature, generally ranging from 70°F to 76°F ([Baensch](#) recommends a considerably warmer range of 79°F to 82°F). My tap water is soft and neutral, and I slightly lowered the pH in their tank to about 6.5 by the occasional addition of blackwater extract.

While I have read accounts of aquarists who have been able to get these fish to eat flakes, I have never been able to get them to accept anything but live food, generally adult brine shrimp and small blackworms. When I

noticed fry in the tank, I added microworms and daphnia to the feeding regimen (but I suspect that the fry would have done just fine for quite a while by grazing on the microorganisms that naturally develop on the surface of the sponge filter).

For small fish, they are surprisingly tough, requiring little more care than live food, frequent water changes, and spawning caves. I highly recommend them.

¹Schäfer, Frank, [All Labyrinths](#) (Aqualog Reference Books), Verlag A.C.S. GmbH, 1997.

²Kullander, Sven O., and Ralf Britz, 2002. “Revision of the family Badidae (Teleostei: Perciformes), with description of a new genus and ten new species.” [Ichthyological Exploration of Freshwaters](#), 13: 295-372. (www.bollmoraakvarieklubb.org/etc/badisabstract.htm)

³Baensch, Hans A., and Riehl, Dr. Rüdiger [Aquarium Atlas - 2](#), Tetra Press, 1993.

Scientific name: *Badis ruber*
(formerly *Badis burmanicus*)
Common names: “Burmese Badis”
“Burma Chameleon Fish”
Native: Southern Myanmar (Burma)
and Mekong River (Thailand)
Size: 2.5" (6.0 cm)
Temperature: 70°F (21°C) to 76°F (25.5°C)
pH: 6.5 to 7.2
Hardness: 5° to 15° GH
Temperament: Aggressive towards
conspecifics, Territorial
Feeding: Small live foods

