

Gems from the Hop Shop by Kurt A. Johnston

This past July, I was one of the club members who got up early on a Saturday morning to go on our annual Fish Shop Hop to some of the shops across the border in Maryland. Last year I had to refrain from making any purchases because I was in the process of moving to a new house and didn't want to have to move any more tanks than normal. Well, this year was different and I had some tanks all prepared to be filled. On our second stop at the "House of Tropicals" in Glen Burnie, I came across a tank of some Peacock Gudgeons, *Tateurndina ocellicauda* that really caught my eye. There were about 25 of these colorful little fish just hopping around in the tank and it appeared to me that there were a few females that were heavy with eggs. If you have never seen these fish they have a series of irregular red vertical bars on a light blue body that appears almost metallic. Their fins have a yellow to almost orange coloring with a black edging and a black dot at the base of the caudal fin. After reading about them on the Internet, I discovered that they are native to streams in Papua-New Guinea. Peacocks are fairly easy to sex as the male has a noticeable hump on their head that makes it look like they have run into the tank glass a few too many times. As I was admiring these beauties, Pedro came up to me and was telling me about his experiences breeding them and as he was talking I observed one of the males circling a female that was obviously heavy with eggs. Despite my lack of personal knowledge of this species, I decided to purchase that pair and see what I could do with them.

When I arrived home, I put this pair into a 5 gallon tank that was setup for about a week with a bare bottom, a piece of java moss, and a sponge filter. I also added a heater and slowly brought the temperature in the tank up to 78 degrees over the next few days. Pedro had told me that his pair spawned in a piece of PVC pipe that was capped on one end so, trusting his advice, I took a piece of ¾" PVC that I had left over from a household plumbing job that was about 2.5" long and stuffed the end with some filter foam because I didn't have any caps around the house.

The next day I had a chance to observe the pair and I really enjoyed the sight. The male had started prepping the pipe and would go inside and perform what I can only describe as a scrubbing procedure. He would then come out into the tank and show off to the female and try to entice her into the "nest". During this time their colors became more intense but, despite his best efforts, she just did not seem to be interested. I kept watching and hoping to see some eggs in the nest but the only thing that seemed to happen was that the female got bigger and the male got frustrated. After about 2 weeks I decided that I would add another potential nest to the tank and I took another piece of PVC that I had lying around, that was about 4.5 inches long, capped it with some foam and put it in the tank. The male almost immediately started checking it out and by later that evening he was scrubbing away. Two days later I was getting ready to leave for work and went down to check on all the fish and noticed that both fish were inside the nest. Apparently all the female needed was a bigger house. I still don't know how they managed to both get in there but there they were. That night I could see the eggs in the pipe. They looked like a mass of cottage cheese in there and the male was constantly fanning them. After a couple of days they darkened and I could see that they covered about half the pipe length. At this point I decided to remove the female before the eggs hatched.

Each day I would check the nest for fry, as the information I had read gave reports of eggs hatching anywhere from 3-8 days after being laid. On the sixth day, after spending the evening at the Elizabethtown Fair, I went down to the fishroom and used a flashlight to look in the tank and the male was still in the nest but I thought that I had seen a flash of a small fish but couldn't find it again so, I went to bed with the intent to get up early and check. Next morning, the male was out of the nest and I saw quite a few very small translucent fry darting about the tank. I promptly removed the male and put him in with the female.

I had read that the fry could be fed baby brine shrimp right away but they looked a little small to me so, for the next 5-6 days I fed them microworms and walterworms. After that they easily ate the baby brine and after 3 weeks were eagerly consuming some dry flake that I had ground small. They are now eating just about anything that I feed them as long as it is small enough for them and have started to take the shape of their parents. I would have to recommend these great little fish to anyone who wants to try their hand with something new. I have heard that they make a good community fish with anything that is too big for them to eat and I will probably be trying that out this winter. I suggest that if you see these for sale, give the Peacocks a try. Next year on the Fish Shop Hop, you never know what little treasure you will