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# The Fish from Bung Borapet Swamp

## *Rasbora borapetensis* - the Brilliant Rasbora

by ALEXANDER A. PRIEST

Most of the fishes native to Southeast Asia are fascinating to me. While I keep mostly anabantoid species (and most, but certainly not all, anabantoids are native to Southeast Asia), I'm always looking for new species from this part of the world to care for, observe, and, hopefully, have spawn in one of my tanks. This article is about a small and relatively easy to keep cyprinid: the "brilliant rasbora," (*Rasbora borapetensis*) that I'd like to recommend to all aquarists, beginner and expert alike.

Before I describe this fish and its care, I want to alert you to one possible pitfall should you decide to research them (I like to research all new species I acquire). I had no problem finding information about this fish when I searched the Internet for: {"brilliant rasbora" "*Rasbora borapetensis*"}. Then I decided to write this article and the waters, as they say, got a bit muddy. While "brilliant rasbora" **is** one of the common names attributed to *Rasbora borapetensis*, I discovered that this same common name is also associated with another species, *Rasbora einthoveni*. In fact, *Rasbora borapetensis* has quite a few common names associated with it, including (but not necessarily limited to) brilliant rasbora, redtail rasbora, blackline rasbora, Bora Bora rasbora, magnificent rasbora, and Borapet rasbora.

As some of these common names suggest, *Rasbora borapetensis* have a golden (upper) and silver (lower) colored body divided by a horizontal black stripe extending from the gill cover to the base of the caudal fin, and with red in their caudal (tail) fin. Adults reach a total body length of about two inches. The only external difference between males and females is that mature females will generally have a rounder body, due to the presence of eggs. The caudal fin is in a "scissor" (or "V") shape, the mouth is upturned, and, except for the caudal fin (which, as I mentioned has some red in it), the other fins (i.e., dorsal, anal, and pectoral) are mostly transparent.

The upturned mouth is an indication that *Rasbora borapetensis* feeds mostly at or near the surface of the water, and can generally be found in the upper third of an aquarium. These are very fast moving fish that prefer to swim in groups. When I first transferred them from quarantine to my 90 gallon community aquarium, I feared that they might suffer the same fate as the neon tetras, cardinal tetras, and *Otocinclus affinis* (a dwarf suckermouth catfish) that ultimately became

expensive "feeder fish" for the several large angelfish in that tank. But (fortunately!), that has not happened. At two inches in total length, adult *Rasbora borapetensis* are too large for my angelfish to eat, and the juveniles are simply too fast to be caught. They are an excellent choice to add to a community of



*Rasbora borapetensis*

photo by Susan Priest

peaceful fish. Because *Rasbora borapetensis* prefer soft (dH <12) neutral to acidic water (pH 6.5 to 7.0), with a preferred temperature range between 72° to 78°F, and a dimly lit and heavily planted tank, they are also excellent tankmates for most gouramis, and many other Southeast Asian species, most of which share these same environmental preferences.

Rasboras are cyprinids. Members of the Cyprinidae family include barbs, danios, minnows, red-tail sharks, and carps, among many others. Nearly all rasboras are native to Southeast Asia (but at least one species, *Rasbora gerlachi*, comes from Africa). There are about 70 species in the genus *Rasbora*<sup>1</sup>.

The name *Rasbora borapetensis* literally means "fish from Bung Borapet Swamp." (*Rasbora* is an Indian word, also used in the Malay peninsula, for "fish." *Borapetensis* refers to the Bung (or Buang) Borapet (or Boraphet), the biggest freshwater swamp in central Thailand, to which this species is native.) *Rasbora borapetensis* is probably the most common species of *Rasbora* in Thailand<sup>2</sup>.

In a tank with enough swimming room, *Rasbora borapetensis* is a very easy-to-keep fish for the aquarist. They will eat almost any food you give them (so far, I haven't found anything they will **not** eat!). They do not, however, readily spawn in the home aquarium. If you want yours to spawn, they need to be the only species in the tank. You should have a group of at least a half-dozen. (I should not have to mention it, but I will anyway: you **do** need both sexes in that group!)



A bare-minimum spawning setup would be six (preferably eight to a dozen) fish, with at least two females to every three males (a 50% balance being the ideal), in at least a 20 gallon tank (preferably, a “20 gallon long” or larger), heavily planted with both floating and rooted plants, but with a center area being clear for swimming. The tank should be dimly lit (the best plants for this would be an *Anubias* species and/or Java fern), and the water should be slightly acidic and as soft as possible. Live food should be provided for conditioning. Live or frozen worms and brine shrimp closely approximate their native diet (in the wild, *Rasbora borapetensis* feed on zooplankton, insects, worms, and crustaceans). The tank should be well-filtered (good water quality is especially important to induce spawning), but filtration that causes large water movement should be avoided (*Rasbora borapetensis* is native to swamps, ponds, streams, and drains, usually in slow-flowing, sometimes muddy water).

Once the fish have been conditioned by feeding live foods, and one or more females appear to be full of eggs (they will become noticeably “fatter”), spawning may be induced by adding small amounts of cool water every few hours

**Scientific Name:** *Rasbora borapetensis*  
**Common Names:** Brilliant Rasbora, Redtail Rasbora, Blackline Rasbora, Bora Bora Rasbora, Magnificent Rasbora, Borapet Rasbora  
**Adult Size:** about 2 inches (TL)  
**Water temperature:** 72° - 78°F (22° - 26°C)  
**Hardness:** <12dH  
**Acidity:** 6.5-7.0 pH  
**Nutrition:** Omnivore; small live, frozen and dry foods  
**Native Habitat:** SE Asia: Mekong, Chao Phraya Meklong basins; northern Malay Peninsula  
**Sexual dimorphism:** Adult females rounder body  
**Temperament:** Peaceful, very active, schooling

(thereby simulating the rainy season in their native habitat). Several spawning episodes will usually result in from 5 to 12 eggs from each female being produced, with a typical spawn total, per female, of 30 to 50 eggs.

As is true for many cyprinid species, *Rasbora borapetensis* are egg scatterers. They provide no parental care and in fact will readily eat their own eggs. Large pebbles on the bottom of the tank will allow the eggs to fall through and (hopefully) not be eaten. Supposedly, plastic mesh will serve the same purpose, but in my experience, if the mesh has openings wide enough to allow most of the eggs to fall through, hungry adults can and will use those openings for a “snack” and could potentially become trapped under the mesh, so large pebbles are my choice, even though some eggs will be exposed to the ever-hungry adults.

(Since adults will eat any eggs they can find, adults should be removed once you have evidence that a spawning has occurred.)

Anyone who has read any of my prior articles on care and breeding of fish knows that I am a strong advocate of having a sponge filter in every tank, regardless of what other filtration you may use, and this species is no

exception. Any filtration in the now fry/egg “grow-out” tank (as you should have removed all adults) should be discontinued, except for a mature sponge filter. Depending on the water temperature, the eggs will hatch within 18 to 48 hours (the warmer the water, the sooner the eggs will hatch, but high temperatures are best avoided), with the fry free-swimming between 24 to 48 hours afterwards.

The first fry food should be extremely small, such as green water, paramecia, newly hatched

brine shrimp, or microworms. Commercial fry food for egg layers will also work, but this type of food can more readily foul the water if left uneaten. Even if you don't have green water or paramecia handy, if your sponge filter is sufficiently mature (meaning that it has been running in a tank containing fish for awhile), the fry can graze on the naturally-occurring microorganisms on the sponge. Frequent water changes are essential for the fry tank. Initially, when the fry are very small, a length of airline tubing with an airstone on the end works well as a mini-syphon. This will allow you to make water changes without endangering the fry, as water will pass through the airstone without syphoning out even the smallest newborn fish. This, however, will not remove solid waste, so a water change that sucks up accumulated detritus should be performed as soon as it is safe to do so.

All in all, this is a very attractive small fish that will add color and considerable action to any peaceful community tank whose basic water parameters match its requirements. It is also excellent by itself in a species tank. But, to show them at their best, any tank you put them in should be long enough (and while well planted, have an open area wide enough), to allow these fish to school.



#### References

<sup>1</sup><http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rasbora> (as of 7/19/2009, 04:35 EDT)

<sup>2</sup>Brittan, Martin R., *Rasboras, Keeping & Breeding Them In Captivity*, T.F.H. Publications, Inc., 1998

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## The GCAS Author Award Program

by SUSAN PRIEST

This brief article is here to serve as a refresher for continuing members and an introduction to those of you who have joined our ranks since March 2009. The GCAS has a program which provides various incentives and awards to members who contribute to **Modern Aquarium**.

With every article, photograph, puzzle, or drawing you contribute to this magazine, you will earn points. As these points accumulate, you become eligible to receive certificates of accomplishment. An article of less than 500 words is worth five points, and an article of more than 500 words is worth ten points. If an article is accompanied by photos or illustrations, the first two will each earn an extra five points. A photo which is used on the cover will earn you ten points. A puzzle will earn five points. Articles on fish in the C.A.R.E.S. program earn double points.

Levels of accomplishment start at twenty five points which designates you as an "Author." The levels progress all the way up to "Editor Emeritus," which means you have earned ten thousand points! (No one has accomplished this yet.) There are ten levels in between, and each time you reach a new level you will receive a certificate of accomplishment. The person who earns the most points within a calendar year will earn the designation of "Author of the Year."

I bet you didn't guess that I was a mind reader. I bet you didn't know I could tell that in the back of your mind you were saying to yourself "is that it?!" Well, that's not it. There's more.

Every year at the GCAS Holiday party we hold a special raffle for "Authors and Contributors Only."

The only way you can be entered in this special raffle is to make a contribution to **Modern Aquarium** within the current calendar year. For every five points you earn in a year, you will be given one raffle ticket. This year's prize will be an autographed book by someone who is very well known in the hobby. I will not tell you who it is.

I'm not done yet. There is one more opportunity (actually two more) to reap rewards with your contributions. Virtually every article which gets published in **Modern Aquarium** is also entered into the Northeast Council of Aquarium Society's article contest, as well as the Federation of American Aquarium Society's publication awards. Your articles will be in competition with those by other authors from all over the country (as well as Canada and Puerto Rico). Winning authors will receive extra bonus points in, you guessed it, our own Author's Award Program. It is particularly gratifying to have your article recognized in these national venues.

Regular contributors to **Modern Aquarium** believe that writing is its own reward. We also believe that sharing your knowledge and observations is the most lasting gift you can make to the hobby. For those of you who need a little bit of extra incentive, we hope that there is something here, some feature of the GCAS Author Award Program, which will give you that incentive.

For a complete list of the rules and rewards of the AAP, see the December 2008 issue of **Modern Aquarium**.

