

The AQUARIUM



A BLUE BEAUTY (*Fundulopanchax coeruleus*)

Photographed in Natural Colors by Wm. T. Innes

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THE BLUE GULARIS

[*Fundulopanchax coeruleus*, Boulenger]

BY

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● *This is one of our most gorgeously colored aquarium fish. It is still classed as a rarity, as few breeders have mastered the difficulties of spawning it in captivity.*

SOME years before my life began to revolve around fish, I met a man who insisted on showing me his collection of tropicals. Having never even heard of the existence of these small exotics, the spectacle of fifty or more varieties living in obvious contentment within the walls of an ordinary home so amazed me that details simply didn't register, and later on when I had become a fancier myself, I was able to recall only one of the fish I had seen that day. This fish had made a very distinct impression because of its unusual and beautiful blue colors, which were set off and intensified by a splash of bright orange either in the tail or on the side—I couldn't remember which. Its shape and size had not mattered. I could only think of the colors.

For many months after passing the novice stage I tried to locate this fish in the stocks of dealers, without coming across anything resembling it. Finally it showed up in a shipment from Germany and I learned for the first time that my long sought fish was *Fundulopanchax coeruleus*—otherwise known as Blue Gularis. The price was more than I could afford, but for fear of losing a rare opportunity, I bought a pair.

Knowing little about them, I placed them in a healthy ten-gallon tank with several other fish. For five or six weeks they improved steadily in size and color. They ate whatever was offered and

showed no quarrelsome or other trouble-making tendencies. Then one morning I came downstairs and was overjoyed to find they had begun to spawn. Both fish were moving about close together on the bottom, seemingly in search of something. Every few moments they would halt at the foot of a plant or over a heap of mulm and shiver. After a few seconds this would end with a jerk, and the fish would move on.

My first impulse was to remove the other fish from the tank, but being unable to think of a suitable place to put them, I figured that as the Gularis were likely to continue spawning for a week at least, it would do less harm to let the transfer wait until I could make the necessary preparations. The delay was fatal. I was called out of town that day, and returned home forty-eight hours later to find the female floating bottom up on the surface of the water. No wounds, no evidence of disease. Just plain dead.

Never suspecting murder, I immediately purchased another female, and with renewed hopes placed her in the tank, meanwhile having removed all fish but the male Gularis. Before I could set down the container which the female had occupied, the male swam up, eyed the intruder for a second and then lunged. The luckless female rolled

her eyes, fell over on her side and never moved again.

Discouraged, but not quite ready to give up, I sought a third female. The importer was sold out, and I soon found I would have to await another German shipment. While I was still waiting, the male evidently decided that life was not worth living anyhow and refused to eat. After losing all his color and becoming a shabby, emaciated wreck, he finally died, despite all efforts to save him.

With his death my interest in the Gularis faded, and might never have returned had it not been for a fish displayed by Dr. James H. McKee, of Philadelphia, at one of the meetings of the Pennsylvania Fish Culturists' Association last spring. The fish in question (which was bred in Philadelphia, by the way) was not only an exceptionally fine specimen of *Fundulopanchax coeruleus*, it was the most gorgeously beautiful fish of any species I had ever laid eyes on. In addition to exquisite coloration, it had fins and tail almost as large in proportion to its body as those of a fine veiltail *Betta* or goldfish. To finish off the effect, not only the tail but the dorsal, anal and pectoral fins as well tapered out to long, waving streamers. It was, in short, the kind of fish that every true enthusiast hopes some day to produce as his crowning achievement.

Needless to say that with such a mark to aim at I am again attempting to breed the Gularis. It may have its bad points, but so far as I am concerned any fish as beautiful as this can have all the bad points there are, and still be worth while. Before acquiring my present pairs, however, I carefully looked up all available writings, scientific and otherwise, concerning this fish, and from these writings have summarized the following information.

Fundulopanchax coeruleus comes from the dark, overgrown jungle streams and pools of West Africa. The first specimens known to aquarists were brought into Germany about 1903 by sailors. Many fish were lost before the secret of breeding was mastered, and until recent years the only specimens available were fish brought from their native waters by way of Germany. They are now being bred in fair quantities in both Germany and the United States, however, and can be purchased from a number of dealers at far more moderate prices than formerly; although this is not yet and probably never will be a low-priced fish.

According to most writers on the subject, the Gularis, for reasons not specified, requires a large tank — not less than twenty-five gallons. Thick planting, old clear water, with a layer of mulm on the bottom, and a temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit (as nearly as possible) are the only other requirements mentioned. Slight additions of sea water or sea salt are said to be beneficial.

The species has been known to spawn at three months of age, but such early spawning, even when possible, is not to be recommended. Authorities disagree as to whether or not the sexes should be kept separate prior to mating. The eggs are laid singly in the manner described earlier in the article; and fifteen to twenty constitutes a day's spawning. Ordinarily the fish will spawn for about six days and then rest for two weeks before repeating. Too high a temperature during the spawning period causes the male to become too impetuous and this results in poorly fertilized spawn. Best results are had at 74 to 77 degrees Fahrenheit. The eggs hatch slowly, three to eight weeks being the time usually required for the young to appear.

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the bottom, standing upon their tails in a cluster. These had hatched in about 48 hours and were approximately an eighth of an inch in length.

"I had four spawns from these fish, but only succeeded in raising those I removed from the nest. Dried lettuce leaves had been placed in the water and I have no doubt the young lived from the infusoria produced from the decomposition of these leaves. Later I fed them *Daphnia*, and they were finally raised to maturity, much to my satisfaction and joy.

"Since this experience I have learned more about the necessary conditions of water for breeding various kinds of fishes, and as *Chaetodons* come from

water which is slightly acid in nature, I have no doubt that greater success could be had by seeing to it that the aquarium water is slightly acid where *Chaetodons* are kept, and especially where they are bred. Fishes can often live in water of a quality not entirely suited to them, but when it comes to breeding, that is another matter, and for the eggs to hatch and be successfully reared, it is most desirable to have the correct acid or alkaline conditions provided. No doubt this applies more to some fish than to others, but I am confident that the *Chaetodon* is an acid-water fish."

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To avoid the risk of cannibalism, parents and young must be separated. Some breeders remove the parents to another tank; others take out the eggs in previously installed shallow trays, which, during the incubation period, are carefully shielded from strong light. One breeder raised a number of young in the tank with the parents, but it was, as he admitted, wholly unintentional on his part. He did not know the fish had spawned.

The young require at least a percentage of live food for the first few weeks; Infusoria for the earliest stage, followed by rotifers, *Cyclops*, *Daphnia* and chopped tubifex or *Enchytrae* in order. In the absence of live food, scraped beef or veal, crushed tubifex or *Enchytrae* may be used, but results are not apt to be worth while unless microscopic live food is available.

Once out of the baby stage, the natural greediness of the Gularis makes it a comparatively simple matter to feed

him. When hungry he will snap at anything that looks like food, and while, as Dr. Bade wrote in his *Fundulopanchax* article in the May issue of this magazine, his nature is to investigate anything that moves and ignore all else, he soon learns to recognize food in any form, particularly if other fish bite at it first.

The prize specimen owned by Dr. McKee, I believe, was chiefly fed on boiled shrimp and oatmeal, which he did not like at first, but later ate with no coaxing.

If the Gularis is kept in a sufficiently large tank in which the water is old and well seasoned and the vegetation is plentiful and thriving, his health will give little concern. Fish that are not in prime condition when purchased, or that get slightly out of condition, will usually respond to a mild sea salt bath: one-half teaspoon per gallon.

The best natural foods for this species are mosquito larvae, *Chironomus* larvae (blood worms), and *Chaoborus* larvae (glass worms).