

# SWORDTAIL CHARACIN, *Corynopoma riisei*

By Chase Klinesteker SWAM, May/June 1994



Male Swordtail Characin Photo by Darrell Ullisch

## A STRANGE FISH

I remember reading the Innes book "Exotic Aquarium Fishes" about 40 years ago and seeing a picture and article about the Swordtail Characin, *Corynopoma riisei*. A tetra with internal fertilization? Paddles on long extensions of gills? A characin with long flowing fins and a swordtail? It seemed hard to believe. Only last year did I obtain some of these fish to see for myself, and they lived up to their reputation and more! I have kept and bred several species of characins over the years, but these are by far the most interesting and unusual tetras I have ever seen.

## DESCRIPTION

The Swordtail Characin comes from Trinidad and east Colombia, South America. It is a very peaceful and constantly swimming fish, more like a danio than a tetra. Adults are mature at 2, and fully grown at 3 inches. They are hardy and easy to keep, preferring hard water (very untetra like!). Their temperature range is 68 to 88 degrees, with 75 to 80 about right. They may be slightly more susceptible to Ick, but the standard salt treatment cures them quickly. They eat most foods with gusto, with the males often looking as full as females after feeding. They eat at the water surface and will catch falling food, but seldom pick up food from the bottom, mostly inhabiting the upper 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the water column. The body color of this fish is silver with mostly clear fins. Under good conditions (live plants, proper lighting, etc.) there is a golden sheen over the body and yellow edging of the tail. Both sexes have a subtle dark spot about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> back on the body below the lateral line. The males "paddles" at the end of the gill extensions are dark. With certain lighting, the body is transparent and the spinal column can be easily seen. Most pictures I have seen of this fish do not show it at its best coloration or form. A courting male with fins spread fully and "paddle" extended out in front of the female is really something to see!

## EASY TO BREED

The Swordtail Characin is an easily bred and prolific fish. Its sex differences and breeding habits are most interesting. Females have short fins and appear similar to a danio in body and finnage. Males, however, have long flowing dorsal fins that extend beyond the base of the tail. They also have a long extension on the lower lobe of the tail fin, hence the name "Swordtail". The males' anal fin is much longer and broader than the females and has a typical tetra anal hook. Their most unusual feature is the paddle on the end of a long gill plate extension. In courting, these appear to be used to attract (or distract) the female. The male will flare his gill on the side the female is on, and the paddle will be kept in front of the females' face as he spreads his fins. It is still not certain how internal fertilization takes place, and I did not observe any direct contact, but they are very fast moving fish. Talk about easy to breed! A full female is placed alone in a planted tank and she lays fertile eggs on her own. I observed the female wiping or scratching against broadleaf plants, scattering eggs randomly. The eggs are tiny and several hundred are laid. Some articles say they do not eat their young, but I think that some survive in a planted tank because the fry hide well until they can swim fast. For me, only 12 fry survived in a planted 20 gallon tank with 6 adults, but I hatched well over 150 fry when I put the female in a tank alone. I did observe adults eating their fry and larger fry eating their smaller brethren. It is wise to sort out and separate the fry that grow faster to decrease predation. The eggs hatch in about 2 days and a few days later become free-swimming. They need infusoria for 2 to 3 days before they will take newly hatched brine shrimp. At that point, they grow quite fast.

I highly recommend the Swordtail Characin as an unusual, interesting, and attractive fish to keep and breed.