

RAINBOW EMPEROR TETRA, *Nematobrycon lacortei*

By Chase Klinesteker GVAC Tank Notes, July-Sept 2016



Pair of Rainbow Emperor Tetras, Male below

A BEAUTIFUL FISH

The Rainbow Emperor is not often seen in the hobby, although it is considered very beautiful and more colorful than its' relative, the Emperor Tetra, *Nematobrycon palmeri*. An older common name is the Red-Eye Emperor Tetra. It is not often seen because it is difficult to breed and not prolific. The 2 species appear very similar. One way to tell the 2 species apart is that the Emperor Tetra has fairly small eyes in relation to its' face, and the Rainbow Emperor Tetra has quite large eyes with some red color in them. It comes from western Columbia and the Rio San Juan. I recently acquired 5 fish (2 males and 3 Females) at a GVAC meeting and mini-auction on May 14, 2016. They were in 2 bags and the females looked very ragged, so much so that only one female survived, even though they were soon separated and treated for disease. The males had lacerated their fins severely, and their aggression is likely an important reason they are difficult to breed. Females will not back down from a fight, often to their disadvantage! They also can be aggressive towards other species of fish if you only have a few individuals. They are a schooling species and are more peaceful in larger numbers. Males are larger, have slightly longer fins, and are more colorful than the females. Males also have an extended filament in the center of the caudal fin, but that is often chewed off from the fighting.

BREEDING

The Rainbow Emperor will eat a variety of foods, but they are not as gluttonous as the palmeri. In fact, females do not fill up with eggs, and it is hard to tell when they are ready to spawn. Soft, acid water is usually recommended at PH of 5-7, with temperatures 75-80 degrees. It is smaller than its cousin, reaching only about 2 inches. Plants, leaf litter, and dim lighting are preferred. The sexes were conditioned separately and then placed in a 2 ½ gallon drum bowl of rainwater, large gravel on the bottom to hide the eggs, and spawning mops and plastic plants. A peat moss box filter was used to keep the water clear and acidify the water. After 2 days and no action, I removed 1/3 of the water and replaced it with tap water. I noticed spawning activity right away, and left them in for 36 hours before siphoning to look for eggs. I expected to get 50 or more eggs because the plants were thick and they should not be able to eat many. The results were disappointing, as I could only find 12 eggs! I placed the eggs in rainwater and methylene blue to hatch and replaced about 50% of the water in the breeding bowl. 2 days later I collected 15 more eggs. That is another reason they are rarely seen in stores----they are not prolific, only lay one egg at a time, and are likely daily spawners. The eggs and fry are light-sensitive, and the fry are very tiny and need infusoria for about a week.

The Rainbow Emperor Tetra is a gorgeous fish that offers a challenge to breed. If you ever come across some, snap them up. You will not be disappointed!!

Chase Klinesteker



Male Nematobrycon lacortei

Photo by Darrell Ullisch