

Beckford's Pencilfish Breeding

Supplement to the July 2008 FAMA article "Beckford's Pencilfish."

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For successful aquarium breeding and rearing of Beckford's pencilfish fry, one needs a healthy, mature male and female and soft water for the eggs to develop into embryos and then fish fry.

For success, a separate small tank is needed for the breeders that contains soft (dH 4 to 8) and acidic (pH 5.0 to 6.0) water that is maintained at around 82 degrees F. Additionally, the tank should contain some Java moss, which makes an ideal medium to receive the eggs during spawning and prevents them from being immediately eaten.

Adult fish, where male and female fish have been separated from each other and have been conditioned on live food for at least a week, are added to the tank in the evening and usually spawn at first light. The spawning tank can be used as the holding tank for the female in the week prior to spawning.

Pencilfish are egg-eaters and both parents should be removed as soon as egg laying is complete. A large female can lay as many as 200 eggs. The eggs usually hatch in 24 hours or so and initially the developing fry cling to the sides of the aquarium as they develop into tiny slivers, taking another five days or so before they are free swimming and start looking for their first meal.

Pencilfish fry are small and do best on live rotifers found in an infusoria culture that should be set up a week prior to spawning. The infusoria should be fed to the fry for at least a few days. By the time the fry are seven days old they should be big enough to take newly hatched brine shrimp. Tiny amounts of powdered foods can be added at this stage or earlier if live foods are not available. This would probably result in a lower survival rate of fry.

Once the fry are free swimming, a small, air-powered sponge filter is effective in removing ammonia and nitrites. Regular water changes and uncrowded conditions will help the fry to grow quickly, and they should start to show some coloring within four or five weeks and are sexually mature within six months.

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