

Caring For Your Killifish

INTRODUCTION

Killifishes are one of the most interesting groups of aquarium fishes in the hobby. They are most closely related to the *poeciliid* livebearers, and at one time were referred to as “egg-laying toothcarps” to distinguish them from “livebearing toothcarps” such as guppies and swordtails.

Killies are found all over the world, including North and South America, Africa, Europe and Asia. There are several species of killies that live in the Great Lakes region of the United States and can be found in our local creeks and streams. However most of the killies commonly found in the hobby come from either Africa or South America.

HABITS

Most killies are solitary fish. They do not school like *tetras*, and prefer to spend their time lurking in plants. Some larger killies are very aggressive and should be kept by themselves, while others are timid and retiring. Nearly all killies are good jumpers, so the killie aquarium should be kept well covered.

MAINTENANCE

Killies are not demanding where water conditions are concerned, providing the water is kept clean. Many killie fanciers add 1/2 teaspoon of salt per gallon of water, as killies are susceptible to diseases such as velvet. A pair of killies can be kept in a 2 1/2 gallon aquarium, while larger species need ten or twenty gallon tanks. Most killies are not good community tank fish and are best kept by themselves. Killies are carnivorous by nature, and prefer live or frozen food. Killies do not do well when fed exclusively flake food and soon weaken and die.

When kept in a community tank, the slow-moving killies may not be able to compete with its faster, more aggressive tanks mates. Live baby brine shrimp is an excellent food for most killies, as are live blackworms and white worms, frozen bloodworms and frozen brine shrimp. The larger species are fond of earthworms and baby guppies.

BREEDING

Killies are traditionally broken up into two classes based on their method of breeding: mop-spawning and bottom-spawning.

- **Mop-spawning** killies deposit their egg in a yarn mop or plant leaves where they can be removed by the aquarist and water-incubated in a small container. The eggs usually take two weeks to hatch and the young are large enough to immediately eat baby brine shrimp or vinegar eels.
- **Bottom-spawning** killies lay their eggs in dirt or peat moss on the bottom of the tank. The peat is removed and the water squeezed out. The peat is then stored in a plastic bag for six weeks to nine months, depending on the species. When the peat is soaked with water, the baby killies hatch out!

This is one of the most fascinating ways nature has equipped these fish to survive dry periods in their natural habitats.

KILLIFISH CLUBS

At the national level, the American Killifish Association (A.K.A.) provides a forum for hobbyists to exchange fish and information about keeping killies. The A.K.A. publishes the Journal of the American Killifish Association, which is full of articles about killies. The A.K.A. also sanctions shows, holds a yearly convention, imports new and exotic killies for distribution to the membership and collects information on the maintenance and distribution of killies species in the hobby. The A.K.A. can be reached by contacting:

www.aka.org

FOR FURTHER READING

Killifish, by Steffen Hellner © 1990, Barron's Educational Series, Hong Kong

Rivullins of the Old World, by Jorgen Scheel © 1975, T.F.H. Publications, Neptune City, NJ.

Atlas of Killifishes of the Old World, by Jorgen Scheel © 1990, T.F.H. Publications, Neptune City, NJ

The Cyprinodontids of Cameroon, by Alfred C. Radda © 1979 American Killifish Association