

# Breeding The Yellow Rainbowfish, *Melanotaenia herbertaxelrodi* By Sam Borstein



The Yellow Rainbowfish is a wonderful species to keep in the aquarium. This beautiful species is not only easy to maintain, but also quite easy to breed. *Melanotaenia herbertaxelrodi* was first described by Allen in 1981. The species was named for Dr. Herbert Axelrod, a man famous for his contributions to the aquarium hobby. The Yellow Rainbowfish is endemic to Lake Tebera and its tributaries in Papua New Guinea and is sometimes called the Lake Tebera Rainbowfish.

As one can tell from the photo above, the name Yellow Rainbowfish is fitting. Males of this species are a fantastic yellow color with a blue stripe down the side. The caudal fin is a nice bright red color and the dorsal and anal fins are yellow-red. Females are fairly colorful as well, although not as nice as the males. Besides color, the sexes of the Yellow Rainbowfish can be differentiated by the deeper body and the dorsal fin ray extensions males possess. The Yellow Rainbowfish is large compared to some other Rainbowfish species. Although fish mature at around two inches (about the same size they begin to color up), they can attain a size of six inches, with females slightly smaller.

*Melanotaenia herbertaxelrodi* is easy to care for and maintain. This is an active species and a tank size should be considered to give the fish



ample swimming room. A young group will do fine in a 20 gallon long, but older, larger fish would benefit from being kept in a four foot tank. The Yellow Rainbowfish is a peaceful aquarium resident. Although males are territorial and will chase each other, they will not go after other fish and usually will not inflict damage to their own kind. I've kept this species with plecos, livebearers, and cichlids, both new and old world. I've found that gentler Central and South Americans cichlids mix well with this species as well as mild haplochromines from the African rift lakes. The Yellow Rainbowfish is a useful dither fish. Their constant activity has helped me lure shy fish out of their hiding spots in a few of my tanks. They also make fantastic target fish for larger, more aggressive fish as they are fast and can take a hit or two.

In the wild, *Melanotaenia herbertaxelrodi* is an opportunistic feeder and will consume just about anything. Common items that are consumed are insects and their larva, plankton, plants, and algae. In captivity, the Yellow Rainbowfish is easy to feed. I've had success keeping these fish in good health and breeding condition by feeding a quality mixed flake, small pellets, and occasional feedings of live and frozen foods.

Breeding *Melanotaenia herbertaxelrodi* is easy to do. You will need a spawning mop, which is easily constructed with some cork and acrylic



yarn. All you have to do is take 100-200 threads of yarn, place them over the cork, and tie them to the cork with another piece of yarn or a zip tie. The reason acrylic yarn is needed is because cotton yarn will rot. I've found green to be the best color, but the fish will spawn in other colors as well. The mops imitate floating plants as well as plant roots where the



fish lay their eggs in the wild. A pair of Rainbowfish will enter the mop to spawn, depositing one to three eggs at a time. These are attached to the mop via adhesive threads. Rainbowfish breed daily and females will typically lay 20-30 eggs a day. Because they breed daily, it is common to see eggs at different developmental phases in the mop.

The eggs take around 7-9 days to develop before hatching. It is important to gather these eggs and hatch them artificially as the adults will eat the tiny fry. There are two options for collecting eggs- picking and whole mop hatching. Picking consists of going through the mop and picking out the eggs (tiny, about 5-8 mm diameter) by hand or with tweezers and putting them in a hatching tank. Whole mop hatching requires removing the entire mop and placing it in the hatching tank. I find there to be advantages to both. The advantage of picking is that you can choose how many eggs from the mop you'd like to hatch. You can also monitor each egg more carefully. This is far more tedious than the lazier method of whole mop hatching as you have to find the eggs and get them out of the mop. With whole mop hatching it's more difficult to monitor each egg and thoroughly estimate the size of the spawn, but it takes far less time to set up.

Hatching the eggs is the same no matter what method is used. The setup I like to use for a hatching tank is a 1-2 gallon tank or container with a sponge filter barely going. The water in the hatching tank should be kept in the mid 70's. The use of antifungal products is optional. I've had success hatching eggs with no antifungals. The key is clean water and removing any dead eggs from the hatching tank.

After the eggs hatch, the next step is to raise the fry, which is the most difficult part in my opinion. Although the fry aren't that small as far as length is concerned, they appear to be just a sliver. It is difficult to feed these tiny fry (4-6 mm in length) and they require microfoods. Typically used are zooplankton, greenwater, and infusoria. Over the summer I maintain a pond in my back yard and was able to harvest pond water which I fed to the newly free swimming fry. As the fry get larger they can start taking larger foods like vinegar eels, baby brine shrimp, and microworms. Once they are through the microfood stage, they are easy to raise and grow relatively fast. Around a half inch, they begin to look like miniature copies of the adults and begin to develop the classic Rainbowfish shape.

The Yellow Rainbow is a fantastic fish to keep. It is not demanding and makes a wonderful resident in a community tank. It will surely add some color and activity to any tank. The Yellow Rainbowfish is a fairly common rainbow in the hobby and is occasionally available from pet shops for around \$8-\$12 each.