

Collecting Eggs from Bavaria



Picturesque views around lake Eibsee in southern Bavaria (all photos: D. Crossett).

I am a relative newcomer to the fishkeeping hobby and have only been keeping rainbows for about the last four years. They have captivated my attention not just because of the individual beauty of each fish, but also because of the flamboyant behaviour these fish exhibit when kept properly in groups.

Yet, as a passionate rainbowfish hobbyist, one of the biggest problems I face coming from Northern Ireland is the difficulty in finding good quality, authentic rainbowfish species from reliable sources.

Most of my local sellers buy these fish in bulk from low cost sources and so the fish that are for sale in my local fish shops often fail to colour up the way they should, or, even worse, are some form of hybrid.

Furthermore, as I am sure most of you are aware, rainbowfish are probably one of the most underappreciated fish species in the hobby and so without the demand, local shops are less likely to stock them. The knock on effect is of course that despite the fact that there are hun-

dreds of different kinds (species and localities), I only ever gets to see about eight species in the shops.

That being said, there are some great sources for rainbowfish in the UK, including the hobbyist group 'Rainbowfish UK' formed and maintained by Alex Carslaw as well as a few fantastic fish shops in England. The problem is that none are based in Northern Ireland, and courier options are limited and prohibitively expensive. So when I get an opportunity to pick up some proper rainbowfish, I have to make the most of that opportunity.

As it happens, just such an opportunity presented itself in March / April 2017 when I had the chance to go on holiday to Bavaria, Germany. As is the case with most of my holidays, I try to slip something fish keeping related into them and this was no exception. With the IRG (International Rainbowfish Group) having such a big presence in Germany, I thought it would be a great opportunity to bring back some quality Rainbowfish. Point of fact, it would be a waste not to!

A few months before heading to Bavaria I put a message out on the IRG Germany forum talking about my planned visit and I managed to get in touch with Gunnar Loibl. Gunnar needs no introduction from me and I am sure you are aware that he keeps and breeds a number of fish types including Rainbowfish, Rhads, Blue Eyes and Gobies.

After conversing for a short while I decided that collecting eggs (rather than fish) from Gunnar would be the best idea for me. I was tempted to get fish, but the

problem was transport. I was comfortable with bringing eggs back on the plane, but I was uncomfortable about bringing fish back this way (I have since changed my opinions on travelling with fish on aeroplanes whilst attending a Corydoras Convention in June, but that is a different story).

Gunnar kindly offered me eggs and told me to look through his available species on the IRG rainbowfish breeders list. With such a lack of variety and quality in my local market this was an exciting opportunity and I took a few weeks researching and deciding on what eggs I wanted. My main interest at the minute is with the *Melanotaenia*, *Chilatherina* and *Glossolepis* varieties, and Gunnar keeps a number of fantastic species (especially *Melanotaenia* varieties). This made things more difficult, but for a rainbowfish keeper, that's pretty much the best kind of difficult there is! I eventually decided in the end to get some *Melanotaenia lacustris* and *Melanotaenia garylangei* (both F3). Pre order done!

In late March I headed out to Germany and as one might imagine, I enjoyed some beautiful Bavarian countryside (see picture of lake Eibsee above), quaint old towns and cities like Bamberg, Regensburg and Nuremberg. It's always important to sample the local culture and with so many varieties of hops growing in the countryside, I also thought it important to sample some German beer. As it turned out, the 'Winkler Bräu Kupfer Spezial' was my favourite!

I had arranged to head to Gunnar's house towards the end of my trip, and

thanks to the internet, Gunnar and I were able to liaise and shore up the last minute details. When I arrived I got the chance to meet Gunnar and his family and enjoy some refreshments. It can be hard to know what to expect when you meet someone for the first time, but from the outset, Gunnar was friendly, polite, humble and was enthusiastic to meet another one of the rainbowfish clan. Gunnar literally bent over backwards to help me and I have very fond memories of meeting him. I was highly impressed with his set up as there were numerous display tanks as well as a spacious, well managed fish room with lots to see.

Transporting the Eggs

Preparation is one of the main keys to success, and as the old saying goes 'if you fail to prepare, you prepare to fail'.

So when I came to Gunnar's house I came prepared with a few necessary items. Keeping the eggs well insulated and warm was my main priority so a polystyrene box and a heat pack were the fundamental elements of my transportation kit. There are a number of methodologies for transporting Rainbowfish eggs, each with various strengths and weaknesses.

Some people favour the transport of eggs in small vials, whereas others favour transport of entire mops. The transport of eggs in vials requires time consuming preparation as each egg is picked by hand and placed on a few strands of wool and placed in the vial. This limits the amount of eggs to the discretion of the breeder, but on the other hand hatch rates are extremely high



The author enjoying his favourite Bavarian beer.

as eggs are typically only picked if they are seen to be fertile. The breeder can then transport a large number of vials for different people. Occasionally a small amount of methylene blue is also added to reduce the likelihood of egg fungus. Given that space was not an issue in my luggage, I decided to opt for obtaining egg mops. Obtaining mops is significantly less labour intensive for the breeder and there is virtually no limit to the number of eggs, save for what the fish themselves were able to spawn. The drawback of this method is of course not all the eggs will be fertile, and



*A small snapshot of a three foot tank I am using to grow out the *M. lacustris* and *M. garylangei* juveniles. As you can see, there are lots of healthy rainbows here.*

there is a higher risk of fungus spreading over good eggs. Gunnar's fish were obviously in optimum breeding condition as the mops were laden with hundreds of eggs, so things looked very promising from the outset.

Packing the mops up is also straightforward and they were treated in a similar way to the way in which one would pack up fish. This may be unnecessary, and in truth, I am no expert when it comes to the transport of eggs, however, what we did worked well and my hatch was extremely successful. In the first instance, the mops were put into plastic fish bags with a little water and tied up with as much air as possible. They were then doubled bagged and

put into a polystyrene box with a heat pack and sealed shut and was not opened until I got back to Northern Ireland. The eggs would take around 7-10 day to hatch, and so there would be more than a safe amount of time to get them back home to where I had a few small aquariums waiting.

When I got home I acclimatised the eggs in the same way I would normally acclimatise rainbowfish, by first bringing the temperature of the bag of eggs up to the temperature of the aquarium water and then gradually adding some water from the aquarium into the bag over the course of an hour or two. I am not sure if this is necessary or unnecessary, but it seemed like



Melanotaenia garylangei closeup.

the safer thing to do. After that, I drop the entire mop into the aquarium and wait for the eggs to hatch. This is always the part that makes me nervous because it only takes a simple mistake or error in judgement and all that effort goes to waste. The waiting game began.

The Results

After several days the eggs started to hatch and there was an abundance of fry, perhaps a few hundred, or more. Since mid April, I have been raising these fry, and most are well over an inch in size, up to around 3cm and have started to develop beautiful colour. I have lots of *Melanotaenia lacustris* and *Melanotaenia garylangei* juve-

niles, and in truth, the hatch was so successful, it looks like my local market will be a little saturated for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

In particular, I hope you view this short story as an encouragement for an organisation like the IRG where simple actions by individuals can help to circulate some of these beautiful species for the enjoyment of other hobbyists and for the preservation of these species, many of which are endangered in the wild.

To Gunnar, and all those people in the IRG that help collect, breed and distribute these fish for other hobbyists, please accept



Melanotaenia lacustris starting to develop those beautiful aqua blue colours.



my heartfelt thanks for your efforts, because without them, most of the rainbowfish we have today would be a mystery

to us all. If you would like a little more information on some of my experience with keeping and breeding rainbowfish, you can find them on my blog, linked below: <http://rainbowfishhobbyist.weebly.com/>

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IRG - Internationale Gesellschaft für Regenbogenfische e.V. (International Rainbowfish Association), founded in 1986, is a community of fishkeepers with special interest in rainbowfishes, blue-eyes, and other freshwater species from Australia, New Guinea and the close-by islands. Most of our 500+ members live in Europe. 100+ species and varieties are kept and homebred in our aquaria. In regional meetings fish and information are exchanged. Our transnational, annual convention brings together many members and sees presentations of experts and the world's largest rainbowfish sale. The date is fixed each year to the second weekend of June.

Do you want to know more?
Just browse to www.irg-online.de.

