An Introduction to Tetras

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Tetras are tropical freshwater fish belonging to the family Characidae (sometimes they are referred to as characins) that are found in South and Central America and Africa. Some tetras are only very distantly related to each other, the name is merely a convenient label used in the fishkeeping hobby. Tetras can vary greatly in size, temperament and suitability to the home aquarium.

Why Keep Tetras?

There are many species of tetra available in the hobby. Some of these are very small and colourful and easy to care for given the right conditions, making species like the neon tetra (Paracheirodon innesi) ideal for beginners.

Physiology of a Tetra

Tetras can be distinguished from other fish by their small adipose fin on their back between their dorsal fin and their caudal fin (tail). They also have a long anal fin.

A Short Guide to Keeping Tetras

Tetras are shoaling fish that need to live in a group of 6 or more of their own kind. Without a shoal they become withdrawn and their long-term health is affected. Within a shoal they exhibit their natural behaviour and are fascinating to watch. Tetras need soft, acidic water that mimics their natural environment, check our caresheet section to see the exact parameters for each species.
Tetras are opportunistic omnivores- they will eat whatever they can get! A staple diet of good quality flake or pellet food should be supplemented with live or frozen food and fresh vegetables. Please ask on the forum if you need advice on what to feed your fish.

Popular Tetra Species

Neon Tetra (*Paracheirodon innesi*)

By far the most popular tropical aquarium fish is the neon tetra. With the right conditions it is very easy to care for so is perfect for beginners. It is a peaceful fish so is suitable for community aquaria but take care not to house it with anything big enough to eat it! This fish is sometimes confused with the similar-looking but more delicate cardinal tetra. You can tell them apart by looking at the red stripe down their side- a cardinal tetra's stripe goes all the way from their head to their tail.

Congo Tetra (*Phenacogrammus interruptus*)

This tetra is native to Africa as the name suggests. They are larger than many species of tetra

available growing to around 5 inches. They have long fins and brilliantly coloured stripes.

Rummynose Tetra (*Hemigrammus rhodostomus*)

This tetra gets its name from its bright red nose. It needs very soft acidic water to thrive and show off its bright colouring. Although it is small and peaceful, it is more sensitive to water conditions than the neon so is not as suitable for beginners.

Blind Cave Tetra (*Astyanax jordani*)

These are curious fish- as their name suggests they are completely blind, having no eyes at all! They live in caves in the wild and have no pigmentation so are a light pink colour.

Black Widow Tetra (*Gymnocorymbus ternetzi*)

These small fish are native to Brazil and have long distinctive anal fins, which give them the alternative common name ‘black skirt tetra’. There is an albino colour morph available, which is known as the gold or white skirt tetra.