

Betta Siamese Fighting Fish Facts

Although there are several different betta species which can be separated into two groups – one being mouthbreeders and the other bubble nesters – male Siamese Fighting Fish, which happen to be the most popular betta, will be addressed in this article.

Male betta fighting fish are more fascinating than other bettas because they are the most beautiful of the genus and they are known for their ruthless fight-to-the-kill fighting habits. Their courageous attacking tactics are the characteristics that earned them the nickname Siamese fighting fish. On a lighter note, however, Betta are also referred to as the “Jewel of the Orient” due to the range of glorious colors selective breeders have been able to foster in them over the years.

Scientifically classified as *Betta Splendens*, bright colored Siamese fighting fish belong to the gourami family and are natives to Southeast Asian freshwaters. Although they are found in an array of colors, females look like plain Jane’s when compared to their male companions. This is in part due to females lacking the elongated finnage males have.

Owners of female bettas may agree that females are somewhat boring in comparison to the males. In fact, except for when they are warding off other betta females or chewing into weaker mollies or some other defenseless fish, the only time female Betta seem even a little bit exciting is during the mating process. More specifically, their impressiveness presents when females release eggs from their ovipositors – genital extensions sometimes called “pearls”.

Cultivated Betta are usually blue, red, or turquoise. However

they can be found in a gamut of colors from green to white to orange and sometimes yellow. Their iridescent colors not only sparkle but sometimes seem to change from one moment to the next depending on the amount and direction of lighting entering their waters. Coloring on male Betta intensifies when they are aroused while courting or otherwise agitated.

In general, captive Betta life-spans range from two to five years when properly cared for; and males residing alone in large tanks have been known to live for as many as six years. Betta life-spans in the wild is unknown.

Adult Betta normally measure from 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 inches (3.8 to 6.4 centimeters) long. Inbreeding, however, has produced larger ones.

Siamese fighters may be kept in containers without filtration systems because they obtain portions of their oxygen supply from water and the rest from air. They are able to obtain oxygen from the air through special organs, called labyrinths, located above their gills. These organs allow Betta to alternate between taking in oxygen through their gills and taking in oxygen through their labyrinths. The labyrinths allow them to breathe in air from the surface of the water.

Betta can live off flaked food and are even known to eat veggies like carrots, corn, and broccoli; however, Betta are primarily carnivores and prefer foods like zooplankton and insect larvae that float on or near the surface of the water. Many Betta keepers like to feed their friends brine shrimp. Brine shrimp, otherwise known as sea monkeys, may be purchased live or dried. Owners can even raise brine shrimp themselves. Captive Betta hold their color better when fed a range of foods rather than just flakes or pellets.

Male Betta court females by dancing through the water with their fins spread out. This is called "flying full mass" and it is very fascinating to see. Once the female is attracted,

the male lures her to the bottom of the water and proceeds to wrap his body around hers in order to stimulate her into releasing her egg clutches.

As eggs emit from the female the male ejaculates in order to fertilize them. Once the eggs drop, the male takes them into his mouth and plants them in a frothy sticky bubble-nest he built at the top of the water prior to beginning to mate with the female. This process is repeated until the female disposes all of her eggs – usually numbering from one hundred to five hundred per breeding session.

Males are responsible for guarding the eggs so once breeding is completed, females must be removed from the tanks, or males, a la female black widow spiders, will kill their mates to make certain they do not eat the young. Males continue to guard the nests until the fry can swim on their own.

Male Siamese fighters are very aggressive. So aggressive, in fact, that they will charge and attack their own mirrored reflections. The fishes' natural aggression encourages breeders to breed fighters; and in countries like Thailand, bettas' native land, males are bred solely for the purpose of tearing each other apart. People wage bets on which fish will win potential "fight to the end" matches.

Anyone with two male Betta can instigate a fight between the two simply by placing them together in a fish tank. The normal method used when beginning a match, however, involves allowing the fish to become excessively angered by placing them in separate transparent containers and sitting the containers side by side so the fish can see one another. It is easy to tell the fish are becoming angered as, like when they are attracting a mate, they begin to fly full mass. While they tear into the see through containers to ruffle one another's feathers – make that fins – the crowd – as anxious for the fight as the fish – places wagers on their pick to win the match.

Eventually the fighters are placed in the same container. The fighting tank is usually bigger than the holding tanks. Sometimes the fish take a moment to adapt to their newer environment before proceeding to literally chew each other's fins off with their tiny teeth.

Watching Siamese fighters nibbling away at each other's bodies and fins can be exciting for everyone who has a stomach for this type of combat. However, anyone sensitive to seeing beautiful long-finned brightly colored fish go from "awe-inspiring" to "what-happened-to-it" in appearance may not care to witness this kind of fish mutilation. The good news, however, is that no matter how badly the fish destroy each other – as long as they remain alive – their bodies – including their beautiful fins – will completely repair themselves in a matter of weeks.

Although it is up to the owners to separate captive fish before one kills the other, fighting to the death is more likely to occur in captivity than in the wild. This is because male Betta in the wild do not normally fight till the end. The weaker fish usually swims off once it realizes it cannot overtake the stronger one. This gesture is impossible in a small bowl or tank that limits a weaker fish's options.