

Year of the Rainbowfish

A monthly column about Rainbowfish by Derek Tustin



Glossolepis multisquamatus
Photo by Gunther Schmida

Glossolepis

As mentioned last month, the *Melanotaenia*, *Chilatherina* and *Glossolepis* families are all closely related with the key difference to telling them apart being body shape. *Chilatherina* are very streamlined, *Melanotaenia* tend to be in the middle, and *Glossolepis* are rounded.

Looking at *Glossolepis* in regards to the Latin meaning of the genera name, well if “Lip Silverside” (*Chilatherina*) makes sense but sounds unwieldy, then the Latin translation for *Glossolepis*, literally “Tongue Scale” (glosso = Latin “tongue”, lepis = Latin “scale”), is both unwieldy and makes no sense. Seriously, while I have never had the chance to look at a *Glossolepis*’s tongue and therefore can’t confirm if it is scaly, I think there may have been a better genus name.

About Glossolepis

The *Glossolepis* family consists of nine species, once again all from northeastern New Guinea. While they can come from both riverine and lacustrine habitats, in all cases they are found in still waters, either lakes or calm areas of rivers. *Glossolepis incisus* was the first species described by Max Weber back in 1908.

As mentioned last month, *Glossolepis* are more rounded than either *Melanotaenia* or *Chilatherina*, and the lower jaw tends to protrude past the upper lip. Another interesting characteristic of some *Glossolepis* species is the long and sometimes ragged dorsal and anal fins.

Of the nine known *Glossolepis* species, six are available in the hobby. Five of them, *Glossolepis doryti*, *G. kabia*, *G. multisquamata*, *G. pseudoincisus* and *G. wanamensis* should be considered very rare, and one, *G. incisus* can be considered to be common.



Glossolepis incisus
Photo by Hristo Hristov

Chilatherina & C.A.R.E.S

Three species of *Glossolepis* appear on the C.A.R.E.S. Conservation Priority Species At Risk List. They, along with their status, are;

- *Glossolepis doryti* – Critically Endangered
- *Glossolepis incisus* – Vulnerable
- *Glossolepis wanamensis* – Critically Endangered, At Risk In Nature

To refresh;

- Vulnerable means “(a) species facing a high risk of extinction in the wild in the medium term future.”
- Critically Endangered means a “species facing an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild in the immediate future.”



Glossolepis dorityi

Photo by Gerald Allen

fish, be sure of the provenance and that you obtained your stock from a reputable breeder. (Jeff Burch in London, Ontario, is known to be keeping this species and they are a pure strain. Unfortunately his school is not currently breeding and he has no stock to sell.)

Personal Experience

I haven't kept many species of *Glossolepis*. I did once spend over \$100.00 on three fish that were being sold as *Glossolepis wanamensis*. Unfortunately, when I sought confirmation of identification on the two Rainbowfish boards I participate too, I was quickly told that they were the above mentioned *G. wanamensis* x *G. multisquamata* hybrid. Also, I didn't leave them in my quarantine tank long enough and after placing them in my main tank, I lost four beautiful adult *Melanotaenia boesemani*. You can ask my wife, but the day that I lost those fish, I cried. So I learnt two very important lessons. Be sure of what you are buying before you buy it, and use a quarantine tank properly.

Also, I recently came into possession of some rather unique *Glossolepis*. The Big Al's in Whitby, Ontario recently received a shipment of six albino *Glossolepis* in error, and before the error was rectified, I managed to acquire them. As they are albino, there is no way to identify the species, although I believe them to be *Glossolepis pseudoincus*. It appears (based on finnage) I have four males and two females. It is my hope that I can breed them. I'm working on it now, and plan on writing an article on these strange but attractive fish in October.

Up Next...

Back in January, I informed that there are two families of Rainbowfish, one (*Melanotaeniidae*) with seven genera, and the other (*Pseudomugilidae*) with three genera.

To refresh, the two families with their genera are

- Melanotaeniidae
- Cairnsichthys* (1 species)
- Chilatherina* (10 species)
- Glossolepis* (9 species)
- Iriatherina* (1 species)
- Melanotaenia* (52 species)
- Pelangia* (1 species)
- Rhadinocentrus* (1 species)

- Pseudomugilidae
- Kiunga* (2 species)
- Pseudomugil* (15 species)
- Scaturiginichthys* (1 species)

As you can see, there are 93 different species of Rainbowfish spread amongst 10 genera. In addressing *Melanotaenia* (February), *Chilatherina* (March), and *Glossolepis*, we have looked at the three genera containing 71 of the species. The remaining 22 species are in seven different genera under two families, and we will take a brief look at them next month.



Glossolepis wanamensis

Photo by Neil Armstrong

It is not known if any DRAS members are currently keeping any of the *Glossolepis* species on C.A.R.E.S. Conservation Priority Species At Risk List. *Glossolepis incisus* are occasionally locally available, but *G. dorityi* and *G. wanamensis* (at least pure strains) are not usually seen locally.

A word of caution regarding *Glossolepis wanamensis* – You will often see either *G. wanamensis* or fish labeled as Emerald Rainbowfish being sold in local pet stores. They are not *G. wanamensis*. *G. wanamensis* are considered to be one of the most desirable and beautiful species of *Glossolepis*. But it has also been polluted by hybridization with *G. multisquamata*. Of all the *Melanotaenia*, *Chilatherina* and *Glossolepis* species available, the ones sold as either *G. wanamensis* or Emerald Rainbowfish are the ones most likely to be a hybrid. If you are interested in keeping this species of