

# Siamese Fighting Fish

*Betta splendens*



The Original wild specimens of the Siamese Fighter Fish, although colourful were generally dark. The modern aquarium developed Fighter is very different with brilliant blues, vivid reds, bright greens or a mixture of colours make this a popular and prized fish.



*A stunning Red, single tail male betta*

The popular name of the Siamese Fighting Fish refers to the extremely aggressive behaviour of the males toward each other. Normally completely peaceful to other species of fish, two male Siamese Fighters cannot tolerate the sight of one another and will immediately start a merciless lethal fight. As unacquainted males approach each other they will spread their fins and wiggle their bodies with aggressive threats. Gill-plates are extended and gill membranes protrude fanwise round the throat, then with a lunge the rival males will bite and rip strips off each others beautiful fins. As this happens it becomes harder for the males to manoeuvre and one fish will have the advantage. If the space is confined and the two fish can't get away from each other the fight will be to the death. Often even the victor can be so exhausted from the confrontation that he may die also. Badly beaten males can recuperate surprisingly well, torn fins will knit together again but where they rejoin scars may show and his fins may not regain their full length. In Siam (now known as Thailand) these fish provided sport, large sums of money were waged

by owners and onlookers as two male fish were placed together to fight. Some fish after many bouts acquired a reputation comparable to professional boxers.

As a result, a rule of one (1) male only in each aquarium should be imposed.

Female fighters are not as attractive and are easy to differentiate. Although coloured, they are not as brilliant, have much shorter fins, and are considerably thicker in the region behind the pectoral and ventral fins. Females can be kept together or with one male Siamese Fighter as they will not attack him, or fight to the death. They will often squabble among themselves and have been known to bite scales and tear one another's fins.

One of the hardiest of aquarium fishes they can tolerate temperatures below 20°C for short periods, but prefer temperatures around 24°C. Siamese Fighting Fish can be kept in bowls without aeration (as they have a labyrinth organ), and without a heater only if the ambient temperature keeps the water temperature higher than 20°C. When breeding Siamese Fighting Fish the temperature should be between 25-29°C.

## Labyrinth Organ

The majority of Siamese Fighters found in the wild live in small, warm, organically polluted and therefore oxygen-deficient waters. As an adaptation to this Siamese Fighting Fish, other Anabantidae and Belontiidae i.e. Gouramis, have a labyrinth organ. Found in the upper part of the gill chamber it consists of much folded lamellae (membrane) which is covered with a thin layer of skin rich in blood vessels. Atmospheric air that is taken in through the mouth is passed over and stored in the labyrinth organ, the oxygen is then

absorbed. Imprisoned air lasts for a considerable time when inactive and often Male Siamese Fighters will remain motionless until returning to the surface for a fresh supply of air. The labyrinth organ develops about 3-4 weeks after the young are hatched and until then are completely dependent on gill respiration.

When keeping Fighters in an aquarium with lids, it is important that the air under the lids is approximately the same temperature as the water. Care should be taken when lifting the lids, if a rush of cold air is gulped by the Fighter from the surface, this may bring a bout of pneumonia. This should also be kept in mind when breeding Siamese Fighting Fish.

Male Siamese Fighters kept in a community aquarium may not be partial to other labyrinth fish, i.e. Dwarf Gourami, and will occasionally chase them, but since most labyrinth fish prefer to swim away and avoid a fight, no damage is done.

### **Breeding**

Siamese Fighting fish show a great readiness to breed. The male Fighters will build a bubble-nest. To do this the male will go to the surface of the water and take a mouthful of air. Breaking this into tiny bubbles he coats each bubble with saliva then spits them out, the bubbles float to the surface. Repeating this process continually he will eventually have a large bubble-nest.

It is thought that the males saliva may contain bactericidal and fungicidal substances which help protect the brood.

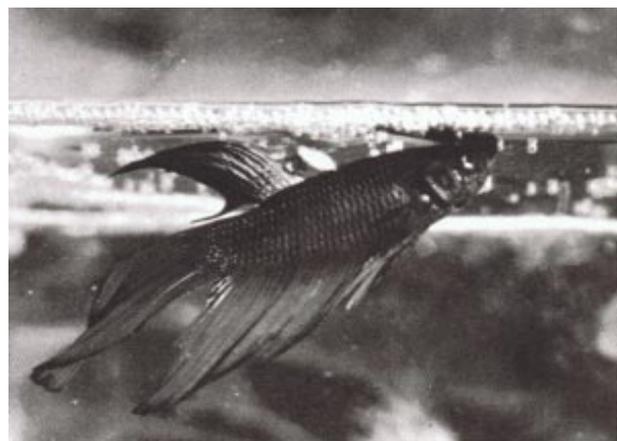
It is best to breed Siamese Fighter in their own aquarium that is densely planted, with some of the plants reaching the surface. This provides the female with hiding places and in some cases the male will incorporate them in anchoring his bubble-nest.

During breeding, males can be aggressive toward the females so if a female is not ready to spawn or if they have just spawned they can be chased and killed, so be prepared to remove the female from the aquarium.

Spawning begins with the male enticing a female

underneath the canopy of bubbles. Only females well filled with roe should be tried for breeding. The male curves his body towards her and envelops her from below. His curved position caused him to roll over on his side, while the female, gripped in his embrace, is tilted upside down. His grip tightens, and with quivering fins he squeezes her until she releases several sand coloured eggs, fertilising them at the same time. The male relaxes his grip and slowly the female drops away from his embrace. As she does so she rights herself from her upside down position and the eggs lodged between her fins start to sink slowly. Either the male alone or both fish together will gather every falling egg in their mouth and place them into the bubble-nest. After more display the male and female will re-embrace and continue to spawn. Usually between 250-300 eggs can be placed into the bubble-nest; then the male will take charge.

This is when the female should be removed from the aquarium as the males first instinct may be to attack thinking the female may want to eat the spawn. Once the female is removed then the male will care for his brood, looking after his nest making any repairs with fresh bubbles.



In 24-30 hours the young will hatch. Bursting their way out of the bubbles, they tend to sink; but the male will pick them up and blow them back into the nest. Some males will raise and protect their fry until they are beyond the need of parental care; but it is often safer to remove the male around day 10, when the babies have become

free-swimming. The young which are very tiny should be fed on infusoria or an artificial substitute for infusoria. (An infusoria culture contain millions of microscopic animals that swim around in the water and can be compared with daphnia that is fed to larger fish). After 8-10 days the young can be fed on newly hatched brine shrimp. Regular one-third water changes should also be done to remove uneaten foods and fish waste, increasing the growth rate of the young.

As the young grow, to obtain the largest and longest possible fins it is best to remove the males from the brood as soon as they can be sexed. Each male can be placed into small glass containers with 1-2 litres of water, and if positioned next to each other will display threat behaviour as they grow.

Occasionally two males reared together from birth may live fairly peacefully together but this will depend on their individual temperaments. Young

Fighting Fish will develop full colour and fins by the age of 5 months and live between 18-24 months.

**Despite the Siamese Fighters fighting ability, aquarists should not be deterred from having one of these beautiful individuals in a community aquarium.**



Can grow to:	7cm
Origin:	Thailand, Cambodia, Vietman, Malay Peninsular and Indonesia.
Food:	Prefers live or frozen food but will eat all types.
Sexing:	Males are more brilliantly coloured, and have long flowing fins.
Swims:	All depths, but is mostly seen at the top of aquariums.
Ease of Keeping:	Easy.
Breeding Method:	Bubble-nest builder.
Breeding Potential:	Easy.
pH:	6.8-7.2
Temperature:	24° C
Tank Type:	Community, but only one male.
Special Needs:	Plants.



Seaview Aquarium Centre

237 Anzac Highway

Plympton S.A. 5038

PH: (08) 8371 0380

email: [seaview@seaviewaquarium.com.au](mailto:seaview@seaviewaquarium.com.au)

website: [www.seaviewaquarium.com.au](http://www.seaviewaquarium.com.au)