

The Bird Wrasses, Genus *Gomphosus*

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Selection

The Bird Wrasses are NOT easy to collect (all are wild caught), being very quick and smart, avoiding fence nets that are strung up along the bottom to drive marine fishes into. Even once they "hit the net" their capture is not guaranteed, as these are amongst the few species that are wily enough to swim over the "float line" or seek egress from the bottom "lead line". An adept collecting diver will look to hand-netting *Gomphosus* from the barrier/fence net first to both secure this worthy catch, and also reduce subsequent physical trauma to the specimen. As a potential buyer, you'll do well to check for collateral damage from this process, as well as the harrowing effects of being held in cubicles, tanks prior to shipping, and the difficult process of bagging and shipping. Here are three tips for selecting Bird Wrasses:

1.) Check prospective Bird Wrasse buys carefully for signs of apparent physical damage. Torn fins, missing scales are generally easily repaired over time, but damage to the mouth and eyes should disqualify a purchase. Almost all mouth-damaged and nearly all eye-damaged wrasses perish within days to a few weeks.

2.) As a related matter, don't be overly eager to buy "just arrived" specimens of *Gomphosus*. Often these fish are only a day or two from being captured, and may well show signs of damage a few days hence. If necessary, ask your wholesaler/dealer if they will hold a given individual for you, perhaps with a good faith deposit, for pick-up in a week or so.

3.) Size matters! Unless you have a very large system (>100+ gallons) with little present livestock, select for smaller specimens to start with. These ship and adapt far better than large males... which brings us to the pertinent fact that these fishes like other wrasses are synchronous (versus simultaneous) protogynous (first females) hermaphrodites. Meaning they start off as females (initial state) and change at a later time (depending on food availability, social circumstances...) into males. So, using a healthy female, you can expect in time to have a male.

Habitat

Even small specimens of Bird Wrasses need room to move. These species are capable of incredible bursts of speed, and can and do easily damage themselves at times by running into the walls of their aquariums. A minimum sized aquarium for them is a two-foot wide by four-foot long system; for mature individuals make that a six foot long aquarium.

Akin to their propensity for rapid movement, their tanks need to be completely covered. MANY end up as so much "floor jerky", having launched themselves out through a small opening or uncovered tank.



The Blue or Res Sea Bird Wrasse *Gomphosus caeruleus*

Filtration/aeration/circulation need to be brisk. During the day/light period *Gomphosus* require fully oxygenated water to sustain their aerobic activity. During nights/lights out time, they mainly settle down in a crook/crevice to sleep, possibly even under the substrate.

Providing hiding/sleeping spaces and adequate depth and the proper shape and texture of sand substrate is important. A few caves, arrangements of rock, and smaller diameter coral sand are ideal. If the whole system cannot be fitted with this sand, a given deeper (a few inches) area should be set aside for their use.

Tankmates

Hardy damselfishes, medium to larger

marine angels, batfishes, Soldierfishes, basses of good size, these are suitable fishes in terms of compatibility. *Anthias*, butterflyfishes, most cardinalfishes... will not get enough to eat in a tank with *Gomphosus*.

Bird Wrasses do not consume stinging-celled animals, preferring mollusks, small fishes, echinoderms and worms mostly in the wild, so strictly speaking they are "reef safe" fishes, though they will consume smaller shrimps given the chance.

Bird wrasses do fine kept one to a tank, and can be kept as "pairs" (one female, one male), or if your system is very large, a group of females, but do maintain just one male per system.

Foods/Feeding/Nutrition

Bird wrasses are far from finicky feeders and will gluttonously consume all formats of foods in great quantities. In fact, there is typically very little, make that no training time required acquainting *Gomphosus* with novel foodstuffs. As a practical measure, you may well have to feed your Bird Wrasse in one corner while simultaneously trying to get food to your other livestock.

Disease

We have already mentioned the incidental damage and mortalities due to capture trauma and habitat limitation; Bird wrasses are amongst the toughest, most biologically disease-resistant of fishes, though they can fall prey to hyperinfective parasitic disease. Happily, *Gomphosus* are also susceptible to cure by the usual environmental manipulation and chemical treatments employed for the majority of marine fishes.

Given a few weeks careful quarantine, and/or a pH-adjusted freshwater bath between shipping and placement, it is rare that they will carry pathogens into a new system.



Close-up of the distinctive nose which gives Bird Wrasse's their common name.