

# Three-spined Stickleback

*Gasterosteus aculeatus*

Fish · Here all year · spawns Apr-Jul



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A small, slim fish with three sharp spines along the back, bony plates instead of scales along the flank, and a narrow tail stalk. In the breeding season the male is unmistakable: throat and belly flush brilliant red and the eyes turn blue. Sticklebacks are abundant in ponds, ditches, burns and the tidal margins around Dumfries, tolerating both fresh and brackish water.

## BEHAVIOUR

The male builds a tunnel-shaped nest of plant fragments glued together with a secretion from his kidneys, then performs a zig-zag dance to lead females in to lay, and guards and fans the eggs alone. That courtship sequence made the stickleback a foundation species of animal behaviour research. Different populations vary strikingly in armour plating, making it a textbook example of evolution in action.

## WHEN TO SEE IT

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| J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D |
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## QUICK FACTS

|           |                                 |
|-----------|---------------------------------|
| FAMILY    | Sticklebacks (Gasterosteidae)   |
| SIZE      | Typically 4-7 cm                |
| UK STATUS | Native; abundant and widespread |

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