Species Profile: Altolamprologus sp. 'Sumbu dwarf'

Altolamprologus sp 'Sumbu dwarf' is a substrate spawner native to Lake Tanganyika. The climate is sub-tropical with temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's and native waters for this fish are pH of 7.5. I obtained three 1 inch long fish from an individual (Eric Hailey) . Males achieve a size of 2 inches and have the typical Altolamprologus compressed body shape. Females achieve a size of 1 inch and have a white body with some black vertical stripes.

Photo by Diane Tennison

The fish bred in a 20 gallon long tank which contained sandy gravel and was planted with Anubias barteri . The tank was filtered by a sponge filter and had pH of 8.0. I performed weekly water changes equal to 20% of the tank volume. I used fluorescent lighting for a duration of 14 hours each day. I fed the fish brine flake food, spirulina flakes and baby brine shrimp.

When spawning, the males and females turn a dark color (sometimes completely black) and do quite a bit of displaying in front of the female's shell. The only way I could tell that the fish spawned was because the females would stay in their shells and not leave sometimes for over a week. Even when I attempted to feed the fish, only the male would come out to feed.

After spawning, the female retreated to her shell and did not come out for approximately a week. The male continued his normal behavior and did not harass the female any further. The female was the sole caregiver of the eggs/fry. I pretty much left the parents with the fry. I counted approximately 15-20 fry. I am feeding them a combination of crushed flake food and Cyclopeze. The fry were a white-ish color and have an elongated cylindrical shape. Some fry already show black markings as well as a yellow-ish tint. They are approximately 1/2 an inch and are eating well.

The fry didn't require any special care on my part. I left them in the 20 gallon tank with the adults. I plan on moving them if the adults

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show any aggression towards them. The tank used sponge filter for filtration. Once the female released the fry, she did not exhibit any tendency to care for the fry. However, the adults seem to be ignoring the fry and not preying on them. I started the fry off on Cyclop-Eeze. After seven days I started feeding crushed flake food. The fry grew slowly.

Photo by Duc Nguyen

When breeding this fish, you have to patient. It takes quite a while for the males and females to mature. It took me quite a while before these fish spawned for me. I believe it was over a year from the point of me getting them. At the beginning, I housed them with some other dither fish and they exhibited no signs of spawning, so after about 8 months, I removed the other fish and setup a species tank for them. I believe that's the best way to successfully induce these fish to spawn. Overall, their behavior is extremely interesting. They are basically a miniature version of the calvus/compressicep and also exhibit shell dweller behavior as well (they dart in their shells when danger approaches). While breeding Altolamprologus sp. 'Sumbu dwarf' was challenging, I would recommend them to other hobbyist. Although they are not the most attractive fish, their behavior more then makes up for this.

I noticed that the females would pick out one particular shell that they chose as their 'home'. I noticed that when the females were very adamant at guarding their shells, I suspected that a spawn was approaching. Then a few days after that, the female completely secluded herself in the shell. Even when feeding the fish, the females will not come out. Eventually, after about a week or so, I noticed the fry hopping around the tank. I do not believe I would do anything differently in future spawns. As of today, the adults have not shown any aggression towards the fry.

■ *Duc Nguyen*