

Species Profile: *Cynotilapia afra* Cobwe - Orange Back

Cynotilapia afra Cobwe or Orange Back, are native to Lake Malawi. Ad Konings states, in his book *Malawi Cichlids in their Natural Habitat*, that *Cynotilapia* are found in deep to intermediate rocky regions, and open waters of the lake. The climate, as expected, is tropical in nature with lake temperatures at the surface of 78 degrees Fahrenheit. The pH of Lake Malawi varies between 7.8 and 8.5.

I obtained a trio (two males and a female) from another member of HCCC about 1.5 years ago. Since that time I have had several spawns between the dominate male and the lone female. Currently both the males and the female are approximately 3.5" in length. The female is rounder in comparison to the males. But for the most part both males



Photo By David Dockwiller

and the female are a rounded torpedo shape. Males are a light purple/blue with black barring and an orange/yellow coloration on the upper part of the body that extends to the caudal fin. The female is a very light blue in coloration, with no other outstanding characteristics. What is rare about the trio I obtained is that the spawns have produced albino offspring which will be discussed in further detail later on in this article.

The Orange Backs have spawned three times in a 55 gallon tank. However, it has been quite some time now since I have had a spawn to occur. It could be that the female has reached a stage where she is not interested in spawning because of age. Anyways, I am not for sure why there has not been a spawn recently. The 55 gallon tank has a substrate that is light brown and round

(no sharp edges). The substrate is used in commercial applications as blast sand. The 55 gallon aquarium has no plants but I make use of approximately 80 pounds of holey rock for shelter and hiding places. Tank mates include my various *Calvus* and *Compressiceps* along with some very young *Fossochromis Rostratus* that I have recently acquired. The tank is filtered by an

Eheim 2217, with a temperature that fluctuates between 78 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The pH in the tank is unknown since I never test the water in any of my tanks, and I believe it is not necessary based on the hardness of Austin's water supply and the continual buffering of the holey rock. I do perform weekly water changes equal to 15% of the tank volume, and re-

plenish the water along with a double dose of dechlorinator. Lighting for the tank uses a 48" single light strip and is left on for duration of approximately 14 hours each day. The cichlids in the tank are fed New Life Spectrum pellet and Ocean Nutrition flake. In addition, I have recently incorporated the use of freeze dried Krill.

My observations of Orange Backs when they spawn are as follows: the male flutters and shakes around the female to entice her to spawn. During this time the male's colors are more prominent and his finnage is more flared. The female will then become involved with the 'dance' and they will begin to spawn in various locations in the holey rock. I have not observed them spawning in the open unless it is behind a rock. Once

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the egg is released the female will immediately pick it up with her mouth and hold it in her buccal cavity. This process is repeated during the day. I should also note that since the Orange Backs are housed with my calvus/compressiceps not all eggs will be captured by the female. Instead, some are eaten by the calvus/compressiceps.

When the egg is released, and if the female is not quick enough, the calvus/compressiceps will dart in and 'snatch' the egg away.

However, it is difficult for the calvus/compressiceps to 'snatch' eggs from the mother because spawns are carried out in confined spaces. The eggs are cream colored in appearance. After the spawn is completed the male loses interest in the female and goes about his business. The female will hold the eggs for approximately 3 weeks. Of course during the incubation period the female will not eat any food. After the 3 week period is over I will strip her of the fry so that they can be safely raised in a fry tank. The fry are light grey after hatching. The fry tank uses a sponge filter for filtration and the fry are fed crushed flake food. I have also recently started feeding the fry freeze dried Daphnia.

As I stated earlier, I have stumbled upon something interesting in that one of the parents carries the albino gene. Out of approximately twenty fry four will be albino. I have recently placed two of the bigger albinos in with their parents so that I can hopefully spawn more albinos. Currently the albinos are white in coloration with red eyes. Where the top of the body is orange/yellow in males an albino male has a light yellow coloration. Over time it will be interesting to see if this coloration in male albinos becomes more prominent. As I write this article the two oldest albinos are approximately 2" in length.

Keeping and raising Orange Backs is not difficult. I have found that they are non-aggressive towards other cichlids and are only aggressive towards their own when spawning or staking out territory. The dominant male will be more colorful than the other males. I do not know if other males will try to spawn with females if the dominant male is occupied since I have never



spawned a second generation of Orange Backs. Photo By David Dockwiler

I would recommend Orange Backs to other cichlid enthusiasts. They are not hard to maintain if cared for correctly, as with any cichlid, and will spawn quite readily when young. I believe they would be a good addition to a cichlid community tank, and would especially be a success for the beginner. In concluding, I will continue to breed this fish so that I can establish albinos of this genus.

— by David Dockwiler