

Species Profile: *Cyprichromis Leptosoma*

Cyprichromis leptosoma or the sardine cichlids, as they are called in the hobby, come from Lake Tanganyika where they live in schools numbering in the 1000s or more. They are one of the only true schooling cichlids known. They occur in a number of different geographical variants each displaying a different coloration and each variant occurring in both a blue and a yellow tailed morph. While the females remain a dull dusky color the male's colors can be quite stunning.

Cyprichromis are found around rocky shorelines and in open water all over the lake. They prefer a temperature of 74 - 78 degrees and as with all rift lake cichlids like hard alkaline water.

In the aquarium *Cyprichromis* should be kept in groups of at least 6 individuals or more. They are sensitive to water quality and good filtration is a must. They are great for a Tanganyikan community tank because they occupy the upper layers of the tank.

Some care should be taken in choosing tank mates for *Cyprichromis*. They should never be housed with *frontosa* as they are a primary food source in the wild.

Cyprichromis can be very entertaining to watch as the male are constantly displaying either to females or to display dominance. When spawning, the males will stake out a three dimensional area in the open water at the top of the tank. They defend this area vigorously against intrusion by other males while trying to entice the female to enter. As a rule they are quite non-aggressive but I have seen them chase away fish much larger than themselves while defending their territory.

I have one male that is particularly aggressive in defense of his territory which he always stakes out right near my highly aggressive male *Hap. sp. 44*'s territory in my 125. On more than one occasion I have seen the male 44 and the *Cyp* get into a face off. Ultimately the *sp. 44* always backs down. While they look quite fragile it has been my experience that these guys can be quite

tough. By no means are *Cyprichromis* aggressive towards



Male

Photo by Blair Howell

other fish though, they in fact seem to have a calming effect on the tank. This is especially true with my *Julidochromis marlieri gombe*.

I was never able to get a photograph of him because he was always hiding in the rocks before I added the *Cyprichromis*. He now will come out and patrol an area around his rocky home and I have gotten several good shots of him.



Displaying male

Photo by Blair Howell

Breeding *Cyprichromis* is not difficult provided they feel secure in their environment. Once a male has successfully lured a female into his territory he will display

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for her with his dorsal and anal fin clamped tight against his body and his mouth protruding. In this way he induces her to lay an egg. She then turns around and catch the egg in mid fall. Once the egg is in her mouth she nuzzles the male's ventral fins fertilizing the egg and the dance is repeated. Depending on the size and condition of the female she may lay up to 20 or 25 eggs.

Cyprichromis are a very active and fun to watch addition to any large Tanganyikan community tank. This fish is always in demand and is a great fish to breed. All in all I would recommend them to any Tanganyikan enthusiast.



Female
Photo by Blair Howell

— *by H. Blair Howell*