

Species Profile: *Cyrtocara moorii*

This fish was originally described in 1902 by G.A. Boulenger. It was first imported in 1968. *C. moorii* is found in Lake Malawi. It is found in around sandy coastal areas. In the lake it is found following *Mylochromis lateristriga*, *Taeniolethrinops praeorbitalis*, and *Fossorochromis rostratus*. These fish dig into the sand to eat and the resulting clouds attract *C. moorii*. It feeds this way exclusively in the lake.

This fish likes a temperature of 74-79F. A pH of 7.2-8.8 with a dH of 10-18 is recommended. Needs fairly hard water. Regular water changes are a must with this fish. These fish will eat almost anything: pellets, flake, frozen, beef heart, and even small live fish. They need a high vegetable content in their diet.

There is a small amount of sexual dimorphism in this fish. Both sexes are a bright blue color. If the fish is not dominant or frightened, they show three dark blotches on their body (fry coloration). There can also be a cranial bump present on both sexes. I find that you can tell the sexes apart (at least in the fish that I have). The male appears to be a darker blue than the female. He also has longer dorsal and anal fins.

These fish reach up to 11" for males and 8" in length for females (however these sizes are unusual in an aquarium). It is a peaceful, yet territorial fish. It will burrow in the substrate but it will not harm the plants. It will school in a tank if there enough individuals in it. It is recommended to have three females to one male as it is a polygamous fish. It is a mouth-brooder.

For a few days before spawning, the male displays more often to the female. He then prepares a spawning site. The female will lay 20-90 eggs on a selected rock or a cleared area of glass in the aquarium and

will pick them up immediately. However, the male will already have fertilized them while they were outside of the female's mouth. This is not the usual method of Malawian cichlids where fertilization takes place inside the mother's mouth. When the spawning is over the female takes on a blotchy coloration. The eggs hatch 14-20 days later but might not be released for another week or so.

The aquarium they are housed in should be fairly large considering the size they grow to. It should also have



rocks and caves. There should also be a large area with no rocks as they need the swimming room.

I bought these fish from a breeder when they were about 3½" long. I bought 1 male and 1 female. They were placed in a 55 gallon tank. This tank has an internal filter. There are two 4' lights above this tank. They were kept at 78-80F. (The temperature rises to 80 when the lights are on.) The pH is about 7.8 in this tank. There is a gravel bottom with rocks, caves, and some 2" CPVC piping sections scattered in the tank. They were kept with *Aulonocara* sp. eureka orange, *L. caeruleus*, *L. fuelleborni* and *Ancistrus* sp. catfish.

About two months after I had bought them, I noticed the

Species Profile: *Cyrtocara moorii*

male was digging the gravel away from a section of the tank by the front of the glass (behind a rock). I got really excited because this was the spawning behavior I had read about. One day later I came home for lunch and the female showed the blotchy coloration that shows that she was carrying eggs. Two days later her normal color was back and she was again eating. What a disappointment!

One month later the male was digging in the front again. This time she carried the eggs until the end. After 18 days I caught the female to remove her to 20 gallon tank that I had cleared for her. She spit out her fry into the net. So I released her into the main tank and put the fry into the 20 gallon. I got 11 fry from her and they are still all alive and doing well. After two months the fry are showing a blue tinge to their bodies. They also show the blotchy coloration. One thing I found interesting though was they have a yellowish anal fin. (I have since seen pictures of *C. moorii* fry and they all have the yellow fin) They are slightly larger than 1 inch long. I have heard that they are slow growing, so I guess I'll find that out.

— by *Lisa Boorman*