Species Profile: Eretmodus cyanostictus

The Eretmodus cyanostictus is commonly known as the Goby Cichlid and sometimes referred to as the Horseface Cichlid. Without showing you a picture it would be difficult to describe this fish. But imagine for a moment if you will that the head does not look like most of the fish you are familiar with. Imagine the top of the head just over the eye region and then have it slope downward, like a ski ramp. The shape of their head is not like most fish but resembling the face of a horse or a turtle beak.

Not only are the physical characteristics different, but they are bi-parental mouthbreeders. The term implies that both female and male will carry the fry. The female will carry the eggs for 8 to 12 days and then transfer the brood to the male. He continues parental duties for another 8 to 12 days.

Goby Cichlid is found lake wide and in several different variants. They are located in the rocky area of water no deeper than 3 cm. Their main food is the algae they scrape off from the rock structures. In the wild it will reach a length of 8 cm of which the male is larger than the female. Very hard to identify the sexes until they pair off and separate themselves from the others.

I placed all in a 36 gallon corner tank. Water temperature is 80 degrees F and tank contain small piece of holey rock and PVC pipe. I placed a tank divider flat against one side of the tank, which came into play later on. Also a power head was added to a sponge filter to create water movement and some filtration. Majority of filtration was accomplished by an Emperor 200 filter. Florescent lighting was used 14 to 15 hours daily. Tank maintenance was a 20% change of water volume once a week and changing filter was every two or three weeks. The Gobys were fed HBH Veggie flakes and Spirulina pellets.

Photo by Dave Hansen

As you can see the Goby is a very unique fish, not only is it a bi-parental mouth brooder and not only because of the shape of its head but also its short stocky body frame and long dorsal fin. The fin and body shape help the Goby maintain balance in the turbulent water that is its habitat. Not only does the long dorsal help keep its balance but helps in its defense from predators. Their dorsal contain the most spines in the cichlid family which deter the fishing birds that circle above. Another unique item

of the Goby is it's under slung mouth which allows feeding in a horizontal position on the algae covered rocks in the shallow water. Last but not least is the size of the Goby's swim bladder. It is smaller in size and thus they are not buoyant and when not swimming they will rest on the bottom. They will anchor themselves with their pectoral and pelvic fins amongst the rock covered substrate.

I have learned quite a bit from breeding these fish and I made a few mistakes which lead to several fatalities. First of all, the literature I read and information gathered showed to keep them in groups of six or more. So I purchased 14 of the "Blue Spot" from Bluechip Aquatics on October 15, 2005. A pair was soon observed and in a short time the female was holding fry. I did not actually see the spawning. My first mistake was to catch the pair and move them to a 10 gallon tank. I mentioned a tank divider that was initially placed in breeding tank was now used to slowly maneuver the fish to a corner and made catching the "right" fish a lot easier. Without the divider they would swim back in the group and hard to identify the right pair.

I watched the pair and it appeared that everything was doing fine when I observed the male nipping at the female's mouth. I thought this was where they would switch the fry. I was wrong this time, because I later found her dead and no fry. The male went back into the breeding tank. The swapping of the fry The next pair I placed in a 20 gallon and waited. Soon the female was holding. Later she transferred fry to the male, which of course I did not observe. Everything appeared fine until a couple of days later; I found male dead and no fry. The female went back into breeding tank. On my third attempt I waited for another pair to form, produce fry and switch fry to the male. I then waited several more days before I moved only the male to a 10 gallon tank. On November 22, 2005 he released 3 fry. I took him out immediately and placed back into breeding tank. The three fry were fed the HBH flake in a finely crushed form. They are growing fast and doing well.

I am hoping to observe more of the spawning and the swapping of the fry among the parents. This has been quite a learning experience for me and it did not fair well with some of the Gobys. Because of their nature, I assume I need a larger tank to place the "pairs" in for spawning. The 20 gallons did not suit their personality. For those that have bred this fish, I hope you had a better time of it than I did. And if you read this article and it is a fish you keep and breed, let me know your secrets. For all the reasons I have mentioned you should realize this was not an easy fish to spawn and to have fry survive. If you attempt to breed this fish, I suggest you contact some one who has managed to successfully spawn the Goby cichlid or do extensive research.

Information on geographic locations and other information on the Eretmodus cyanostictus was gathered from forums on

■ *Jim Beck*