

Species Profile: Haplochromis sp. "red back scraper"

While exploring the northern portion of Mwanza Gulf in 1991, Yves Fermon and Ole Seehausen discovered a beautiful cichlid, Haplochromis sp. "red back scraper" habituating papyrus and reed beds along the shores of Nyegezi Bay. They were able to collect a sampling that included one holding female. All Haplochromis sp. "red back scrapers" in our aquariums today are descendants from this one collection. Unfortunately, this colorful little haplochromine has not been seen in the wild since and is thought to be extinct.

Yves grouped Haplochromis sp. "red back scraper" as a pseudonyererei and he originally referred to it as Haplochromis psuedonyererei". Although still undescribed, Haplochromis sp. "red back scraper" shares specialized dentition with Haplochromis sp. "purple yellow" and Haplochromis sp. "blue obliquidens". The wild populations of Haplochromis sp. "red back scraper" were in all likelihood algae scrapers.

In captivity, Haplochromis sp. "red back scraper" is an undemanding colorful addition to an aquarium. The species appears to be closely related to Haplochromis sp. "purple yellow". Dominant males have split coloration on the body. The bottom portion is colored a yellow

green while the top, below the dorsal an orange red. The dorsal fin is beautifully colored bright red at the base merging to blue at the edges. Six to eight vertical bars line the flanks. Male coloration can vary from this bright description to a much darker, yet similarly marked coloration. Males can reach a size of four inches, females slightly smaller. Females hold clutches of over thirty larvae. Haplochromis sp. "red back scraper" is a maternal mouthbrooder. Spawning occurs on



Photos by Greg Steeves

a flat surface with the classic haplochromine circling and scooping eggs. Gestation lasts 17 days. The female will allow the fry back into the buccal cavity for a few days post release.

Species Profile: *Haplochromis* sp. "red back scraper"

After this the young are left to fend for themselves.

Our group of *Haplochromis* sp. "red back scraper" is housed with *Harpagochromis* sp. "golden duck" and *Haplochromis* sp. "madonna". All three of these species vary greatly in both body shape and coloration. We do this to discourage any intra species breeding. The mix seems to work well. They are housed together in a 65 gallon tanks with power filtration. All three species are undemanding and do well on a diet of basic flake. They are not so aggressive as some other Victorian Basin cichlids.



Photos by Greg Steeves

Hopefully wild populations of *Haplochromis* sp. "red back scraper" are yet to be found, but as with so many other Lake Victoria cichlids, it might now be up to the hobbyist to ensure the existence of this beautiful little treasure.

■ *Greg Steeves*