

## Species Profile: *Julidochromis dickfeldi*

*Julidochromis dickfeldi* is an egg-layer native to the southwestern corner of Lake Tanganyika where it lives among its rocks. The pH in the lake is quite high, reaching levels above 9.0. In the wild, as well as in aquariums, *Julidochromis* will form a life-long pair bond. Both male and the female will look after and protect the fry and spawning site.

I obtained seven ¾" - 1" long juveniles from Armke's. I've never gotten a satisfactory answer as to which sex of the species is larger, male or female. I've seen a specimen which looked over 4", but mine are about 3 and 2 inches in size. *Julidochromis dickfeldi*, like other *Julidochromis*, have an elongated shape. *J. dickfeldi* are generally tan with dark brown, almost black horizontal stripes running the length of its body with blue at the edges of its fins. The Midnight Blue variant has a charcoal black body and dark blue on the edges of its fins.

From what I've gathered, the Midnight Blue variant came from a pair of "normal" colored *dickfeldi*, but their spawns would consistently produce this dark variant. It is unknown if this variant exists in the wild, but if this dark variant really did appear unexpectedly; I can guess that a pair could form in the wild that produces dark offspring.

I keep a breeding pair in a 20 gallon tank. For substrate I use pool filter sand. For cover, I use Texas holey rock, a terra cotta cave and a single, small Anubia. The tank is filtered by a Aquaclear 200 and the pH is kept constant at 7.8 thanks to the local water company. I perform



weekly water changes equal to 20% of the tank volume. I use fluorescent lighting for about 10 hours each day. I feed the fish a combination of different flakes and Cyclop-eeze.

The fish always seem to keep their same coloration with the larger of the two sometimes showing a lighter color throughout its body. After a pair forms, no courtship is observed other than the pair is always within close proximity of each other. They took up residence in the terra cotta cave where I assume the eggs were laid. Eggs are generally laid on the top or sides of their "cave". I placed the spawning cave upside down to give them more surface area on the top.

The pair laid an unknown amount of eggs. I also believe that this pair is spawning as a step-breeder, laying a few eggs at a time instead of all at once. Little by little, fry appear. The first one that emerged is now considerably larger than the newest arrival, all within 2 weeks. When first spotted, fry have no yoke sack. The fry are also much smaller than I expected and already showing the dark coloration. The small fry can be seen "hoping" along the substrate and rocks, staying close to cover. The parents pose no threat to them and I'm assuming that if there were any other fish in the tank, the parents would be very

***“Males are a soft slate blue to white with a jet black mask and ventral fins.”***

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protective. The fry always stay in contact with the substrate, rocks or cave and will dart out into the open for food and quickly return.

From what I've been told, the parents will tolerate the offspring of multiple spawns until they reach about 1". At which time I will remove the larger fry. I started the fry off on Cyclop-eeze and crushed flake, which is the same diet as the parents (except I don't crush the flake for them).

When kept in a tank by themselves, these fish are extremely shy. Any sudden movement and they will dart into their cave. They will however slowly come out and swim around while I'm still looking at them. I also have a pair in a community tank. With other fish around, this pair seems more comfortable and will not spook easily. Raising these fish is extremely rewarding, mainly because they form life-long bonds. When raising a group, you have to keep an eye on them. Once a pair forms, others will need to be removed. I think everybody should have at least one pair of *Julidochromis*. The species you select is a matter of personal preference. The darkness of this *dickfeldi* variant is what attracted me to them.

As always, start with a group of about six and as they grow, a pair will form. Remove the unpaired fish. I do recommend that you not get rid of the "extras" since there is a possibility that a pair will split, in which case you can try to form another pair.



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— by *Robert De Leon*