

## Species Profile: Mbipi lutea "spotbar"

Mbipi lutea "spotbar" is most definitely one of the most beautiful fish I have ever seen from the Lake Victoria region. I do not have a lot of information on this fish but can tell you they are a distinct species and not a mix of two different furu species. Spotbars (as I am calling them) breed true. The second generation fry have retained the coloration and barring patterns of their grandparents. I am convinced this is a true species of cichlid. It is the name I have applied that I am not so sure about. How did I arrive at this name? Here's the tale:



While on a visit to New England in 1998, I met with Alan Wagonblott and toured his fishroom. Al had been one of the first hobbyists in New England to concentrate most of his fish keeping efforts on Victorian rock cichlids. The fish in his tanks were foreign to me. I had never heard their names, never seen any pictures of them, and knew nothing about keeping them. Suddenly I had to have some!

He directed me to a tank of about 55 gallons. In it was a group of these beautiful critters. They looked as if they had been painted. Knowing full well he would never part with his breeders, I asked if he had gotten any spawning from them. In a 10 gallon tank were a couple of dozen small fry huddled together in a corner.

Al had told me that he had acquired these fish from a member of the Michigan Aquarium society, who in

turn had gotten them from a wild-caught shipment the club had arranged. These came from a region known as Yala Swamp. The contact in Michigan had called them Haplochromis sp. "crossbar".

I parted with a half dozen F1 fry. As the fry began to grow in my tank, they developed the color I had been waiting for quite early. I had no photographs at the time to pass around for identification so I did the best I could explaining the fish to Dr. Les Kaufman at Boston University. Dr. Kaufman is the authority on the Victorian species flock as far as I'm concerned, and I pestered him for information on this fish.

***"I did the best I could explaining the fish to Dr. Les Kaufman at Boston University."***

I explained that the dominant male had a lime green body dotted with six black spots along the lateral line. The tail, anal, and dorsal fins are lined with bright red. The fin rays emerging from the dorsal and tail fins are radiant with bright blue. The region of the head from the gill plate up, is a dull blue with a prominent eye barring that extends around the snout, through the eyes, and tapers out towards the lower jaw.



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Kaufman explained to me that the name "crossbar" was nothing that he was familiar with, but the fish did sound a lot like one he had dubbed Haplochromis sp. "spotbar" that was indeed from the Yala Swamp region. I conferred with Al about this information and asked him if he thought there was anyway that the name could have gotten mixed up as the fish was passed to him. Of course it was possible.

Since that time, I had done quite a bit of digging for information on these beauties, and finally concluded that they had been described in 1996 as Mbipi lutea. There are several 'locale variants' of this species from the Yala Swamp, including the "spotbar" and



"porthole", a very similar fish that lacks the barring and spots when fully colored.

We were fortunate enough to also acquire a group of the "portholes", and managed to get quite a few photographs of them before they met a most untimely demise (have you ever noticed that the only tanks that break are the ones with irreplaceable fish in them?).

These fish are very undemanding. They will subsist fine on basic flake food and eat anything else offered as well. Mbipi lutea have a medium temperament when it comes to aggression as compared to most other Victorians. They seem to sit somewhere in between Paralabidochromis sp. "rock krib" and Haplochromis sp. "44", both which they will coexist nicely with. The lutea is extremely prolific and large spawns from small females are normal. I have had a female lutea under two inches release 40 fully developed fry.

Fry are easily raised on crushed flake and grow rapidly. Maximum size for Mbipi lutea seems to be near three inches. It's a shame these colorful little fish are so rare in the hobby because they make ideal aquatic residence.

— by Greg Steeves