

Species Profile: *Metriaclima estherae*

Metriaclima estherae or Red Zebra, is a maternal mouthbrooder native to the rocky habitat of Lake Malawi, Africa. The climate is sub-tropical with temperatures in the mid 70's to 80's and native waters for this fish are pH of 8.0. I obtained 3 3.5 inches long fish from Erik Dyke. Males achieve a size of 5 inches and are almost albino in coloration, sort of peachy pinky orange with light blue highlights in the fins. Females achieve a size of 5 inches and are bright solid orange almost reddish orange.

The fish bred in a 55 gallon tank which contained pool filter sand and was decorated with large black rocks. The tank was filtered by a Emperor 400 and an Eheim 2026 and had a pH of 8.0. I performed weekly water changes equal to 25% of the tank volume. I used fluorescent lighting for a duration of 14 hours each day. I fed the fish NLS, Dainichi, and Mysis shrimp.

When spawning, the blue highlight color of the male intensifies. The female stayed a bright orange but then became dull after spawning. The male cleared off a corner of the tank. Next, the female laid an egg and picked it up in her mouth. The pair assumed a "T" position and the female then bit at the egg spot of the male fertilizing the eggs.



Photo by Diane Tennison

The pair laid approximately 15 eggs. After spawning, the female retreated to a hiding place to avoid harassment by the male. After a couple of weeks I stripped the female then returned her to the main tank. Approximately 15 eggs representing 100% of the total hatch were viable and hatched after two weeks. The fry still had some yolk sac left but the fry were already orange in color and free swimming.

The fry didn't require any special care on my part. I put them in a 10 gallon tank in a breeder box until they got some size to them. The tank used an Aquaclear 20 for filtration. Once the female released the fry, she did not exhibit any tendency to care for the fry. I started the fry off on Cyclop-Eeze. After two weeks I started feeding NLS growth. The fry grew quickly.

This is a very prolific fish that becomes very aggressive during breeding and is best kept in a tank with other aggressive fish. This is a very beautiful fish that I had in a tank with haps and peacocks. I have since moved this fish out because they were way too aggressive for the tank and stressing my other fish. A very easy to keep fish that grows quickly and

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whose babies are born with color. I would recommend this fish for any mbuna tank or species only tank but be careful with other tank mates.

Be prepared to deal with very aggressive males and offer lots of cover both at the bottom and top of the tank. Males will attack brooding females, so is best to remove her to a separate tank. Despite these challenges, you should give this fish a try.

■ *Ryan Robinson*



Metriaclima estherae OB

Photo by Greg Steeves