

## Species Profile: *Otopharynx lithobates* Zimbabwe Rock

*Otopharynx Lithobates* Zimbabwe Rock is a maternal mouthbrooder native to the rocky shoreline 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 7.7 to 8.6. I obtained a trio of two inch long juveniles from Armke's to begin my adventure. Males achieve a size of 5 inches and are Dark blue with a yellow stripe beginning at the mouth and running through the dorsal fin to the tail. Females achieve a size of 4 inches and are Brown with three black spots on each side.



Photo By Jeff Caroline

I keep the fish in a 75 gallon tank which contains Carrib Sea sand and a lot of Honeycomb/Limestone rock. The tank is filtered by an Eheim 2215 canister and two Emperor 280 hob filters and has a pH of 7.8 with a temp of 78 f. I perform weekly water changes equal to 20% of the tank volume. I use fluorescent lighting for a duration of 13 hours each day. I feed the fish Bulk krill flake, freeze dried plankton and Omega One pellets.

Since my male is dark blue all of the time I did not notice a color change in him during spawning. Unfortunately I did not see the actual spawn, but had noticed the male courting the female in the normal breeding dance over a pit he had dug out in the sand.

I came home one day and looked in the tank as usual and noticed one of the females was holding. After spawning, the female stayed in a lower corner of the tank away from all the other fish. After 18 days I stripped the female and placed approximately 40 fry in a breeder net in a ten gallon fry tank. The fry still had yolk sacs but were already moving around very well. After stripping the female I put her back into the breeding tank so I don't know how she would care for her fry.

The fry didn't require any special care on my part. I kept them in the breeder net for three weeks and then

moved the to a 20L for growout. The tank used a Penguin 170 with a sponge pre-filter attached for filtration. I started the fry off on Cyclop-Eeze and after ten days I started feeding crushed flake food as well. The fry seem to grow much slower than the *Aulonocara* species I am used to.

For me this fish was actually very easy to breed. I'm not sure if the female would have held full term if allowed, but being her first brood I didn't want to take a chance. Although taking some time to reach his full color, I would recommend them to anyone who has the opportunity. The overall beauty if this fish alone is reason enough to keep them.

I would recommend anyone wanting to keep this fish get three to four juveniles so they can experience the color morph as the male grows. I can tell you the first time the light hit my male just right and I could see blue starting to come in it was very exciting. Over the next six months he went through very dramatic color changes and made the whole experience extremely rewarding. I also recommend plenty of rock work in the tank as this fish is a rock dweller. Make sure to leave caves large enough so they can fit into them to make them feel secure.



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