

Species Profile: *Paralabidochromis* sp. "fire"

For many years I've admired an incredible looking cichlid known as *Haplochromis* sp. "fire". I've also seen it referred to as *Haplochromis* sp. "fire red" and "fire red Uganda". Additionally, other references have categorized this species as *Paralabidochromis*. In any case, the descriptive names are accurate. Males



Photo by Dave Hansen

sport stunning crimson red body coloration. Although I have been most fortunate in that I have had the opportunity to keep and study more than a couple Lake Victoria cichlid species, one that had eluded me was *Paralabidochromis* sp. "fire". One afternoon, my friend (and source of many species) Dave Schumacher called to let me know he had located some "fire red Uganda's". He asked if I

wanted any. When I said yes, he replied "good, because I already got them". We had a laugh and in the time since, the formality of "do you want" questions have gone by the wayside. Now he just arrives at my home sporadically with a box or two without my knowledge. It's a very good system that works really well!

Over the course of a year my tiny fry grew to a fairly good size (around three inches) but did not show the slightest hint of color. I had 6 or 7 fish, what were the chances of them all being female? One day, while discussing the situation with Dave, he had mentioned that another one of my Victorian buddies, Walter Niedzielak had a colony of *Paralabidochromis* sp. "fire" doing well and was having a situation with aggression be-

tween males. I was most fortunate in that Walter parted with a beautiful male from his colony to add to mine. As fate would have it, I did have six females and the beautiful male from Walter settled into harem life immediately. A couple weeks later Walter generously sent me yet another male but the pecking order had been established and he did not fare so well. In the days that followed, the

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subdominant male was being continuously harassed and eventually took the plunge of death to the concrete floor. The lone male had his harem to himself once again. All the tank inhabitants seemed happy with this arrangement.

The group is housed in a tank of approximately 30 gallons. The other inhabitants are a couple clown pleco's (*Panaque maccus*). There is a small amount of limestone piled to form a couple caves and some jungle val (*Vallisneria gigantea*) growing along the rear portion of the tank. The substrate consists of small blasting gravel. The tank set up is very simplistic and seems adequate for the *Paralabidochromis* sp. "fire" colony.

The lone male, having no real competition from rivals, does not have a specific territory. He roams the tank at will constantly displaying to the females. When he feels threatened (when I am trying to get a good photo of him, or when I have someone over trying to see him) he hides in the rockwork. At all other times he is shaking and shimmering continuously. Holding females are not harassed by the rest of the group. As far as *Mbipi* go, *Paralabidochromis* sp. "fire" is about as peaceful as you can get.

Although I have not actually witnessed the act of spawning, I am certain that *Paralabidochromis* sp. "fire" is a maternal mouth brooder. There is no pair bond beyond the act of spawning. I have witnessed the frantic display of the

male. It is at these instances that he is truly stunning but does maintain a high degree of coloration at all times. The gestation period is 18 days. After a couple aborted spawns I decided to strip a female at 14 days. At this time the larvae are usually developed enough to survive in a clean bare 10 gallon until they have absorbed their remaining yolk sac and are free swimming. Lee Ann calls them "scooters" at this stage. When I opened her mouth to retrieve her young, I was a little disappointed when only eight appeared. With her eggs, she has also picked up a couple small hyaline colored stones of a size I would imagine would be comparable to her eggs. I have seen this occur with other *furu* species as well. Although I have not yet gotten to it, my intentions are to change the substrate from gravel to sand. At the same time my colony began spawning, Walter's had as well. I was fortunate to have a knowledgeable hobbyist to compare notes with. Walter had reported a spawn of 22 from his group which is likely more close to a normal sized brood. I feel that when my arrangement (regarding substrate) is rectified, the batch numbers will increase greatly.

The genus *Paralabidochromis* (Greenwood, 1956) is designated a small adult size of between 7 and 15cm. The members of this genus have a steeply sloping straight or slightly concave cranial profile and thickened lips. The lower teeth are implanted procumbently (Greenwood, 1980) and the outer rows lining

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both jaws are cylindrical in diameter, and number fewer than most other genera (16-48). Tooth structure is mainly bicuspid in smaller fish (<6.5-7cm) and unicuspid in the outer rows of larger individuals. The two or three rows of inner teeth are separated from the outer by a distinct spacing. Both jaws protrude equally. The premaxillary is prominent. It would seem that the sp. "fire" fall within these parameters.

Males sport the previously mentioned crimson red body coloration to which its descriptive name is derived. The pectoral fins are jet black along the five longest spines with the remainder tinged red. The caudal fin is red-orange. The anal fin is a bright blue-white. The anterior 2/3's of the dorsal is blue while the back portion is red. Small black blotching is found at the base of the dorsal along the blue colored section. A black bar runs from below the corner of the mouth through the eye, across the forehead and down the other side of the face. Two black bars cross the forehead horizontally. The front portion of the body is orange-red merging to a lime-green caudal area. The upper third of the flank is colored blue-grey. A mid lateral bar crosses the body in an uneven and sometimes broken blotched pattern. It is usually always visible to some degree. Females and subdominant males will prominently display this horizontal body bar but will not be as evident in courting males. Female coloration is dull silver with the same black barring marks as seen among males.

Paralabidochromis sp. "fire" is not a particularly picky eater. It adapts well to aquarium life and will accept any fare offered with regards to food. At about 10cm it is a relatively small cichlid. I have not maintained this fish with other species but it has a gentle disposition with co specs. All in all, *Paralabidochromis* sp. "fire" is a great addition to any aquatic collection.

References:

Greenwood, P. H.; 1981; "The *Haplochromine* Fishes of the East African Lakes"; Cornell University Press.

■ Greg Steeves