

## Species Profile: *Pseudotropheus demasoni* II

Following a long absence from the hobby, I got the itch to start keeping fish again after I bought my son a small tank. It didn't take long before I was picking out a 75 gallon tank for myself. I did some research of the different cichlids I wanted to keep and at the top of the list was a group of *Pseudotropheus demasoni*. With their smaller size and incredible color, they are still my favorite mbuna. Before going out and purchasing these fish, there are some things that need to be considered.

*Ps. demasoni* are herbivores from the Pombo Rocks area of Lake Malawi. In the wild, males rarely exceed 4 inches but I have seen some 4"+ tank raised specimens. They need to be feed a diet high in vegetable matter. I prefer to give them a good spirulina based flake and/or pellet. I also found that *demasoni* are susceptible bloat. An inappropriate



diet, poor water conditions or intense aggression from other fish can trigger the dreaded illness. If the sick fish is quickly put into isolation and medicated as soon as symptoms are observed, these tough little guys usually pull through.

They are also highly aggressive toward each other.

Other species in the tank are chased around, but dominant *demasoni* males save most of their aggression toward their own species. Dominant males will not tolerate other males unless the tank is large enough and there are plenty of hiding places. Although I have kept as few as one male and one female in a tank, I think



Photos By Robert De Leon

that they do better in a larger group so aggression can be spread out. Once a pecking order is established, adding new adults to the group can be disastrous. I once picked up seven adults at our auction thinking I could add them to an existing group of 8. After two days and 4 dead fish, a new pecking order was established and things returned back to normal. I suggest starting with a good sized group of one inch juveniles and letting them grow up together to minimize losses.

Sexing *demasoni* can be a little difficult. Males and females have the same coloration. Males generally grow larger and have more defined colors, but I have had a few surprises. I was once certain that a specific fish was a male until one morning she was holding. I

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am not sure as to how long females hold, but I'm guessing anywhere between 3 to 4 weeks. In a large group, it is difficult to differentiate between the different holding females, making it almost impossible to keep track of which one is which and how long they've been holding. I've found that once their mouths look like they are about to pop and their chin is dark black, its time to fish them out and strip them. I've had broods as small as six



Holding Female—Photo By Robert De Leon

and as large 15. Fry have the same blue and black colors as the parents. They eagerly accept crushed flake and grow quickly.

After years of keeping demasoni, I had never seen them spawn. One day I saw the oddest thing. My dominant male and a female were circling each other on the back glass. I kept watching and noticed the most amazing thing. They were spawning on the calcium and algae encrusted back glass. The female was sticking the eggs to the back glass and quickly turning around and picking them up. She would then follow the male presumably to fertilize the eggs. I don't know if the eggs were sticky or it was the rough texture of the back glass that was holding the eggs after they were dropped.

Once the spawning is over, the females usually retreat

to a hiding place for the next couple weeks. I've found that other demasoni will target the holding females but I have never found the aggression to be too persistent. Catching holding females can be a chore as it is easy to confuse them for the other fish in the tank. Once the fry are stripped from the female, I've noticed that they make no effort to try to put them back in their mouths. When I've let the females release in a small tank by themselves, they don't show any post-release care for the fry. Like I mentioned earlier, the fry grow quickly and it doesn't take long before they start chasing each other, presumably practicing for when they mature.

*Ps. demasoni* make good additions to tanks where their proper diet can be maintained. Other species of fish in the tank must also be able to hold their own or the demasoni will walk all over them. Demasoni spend most of their time hugging the rocks and substrate and usually never swim into open water unless it's feeding time. Nonetheless they are highly active, constantly moving in and out of cover and chasing each other around. I would recommend keeping them with other mbuna but I have also had success keeping them with Victorian cichlids, although the Victorians are noticeably intimidated by the demasoni resulting in poor color.

— by Robert De Leon