

Species Profile: *Pseudotropheus polit*

Background:

In Greek, *polit* means a citizen and in Latin it means polished or refined. At one time, *Ps. polit*s were included by Konings in the species *Ps. variable*. However, currently there is consensus to regard *polit* as a distinct species of Mbuna. They are closely associated with other smaller, but relatively aggressive members of the *Pseudotropheus* genus, including the *Ps. perspicax* group. They are also similar to *Ps. minutus* types but have more elongate bodies and lack the black submarginal band in the dorsal fin. According to Konings the part of Lake Malawi they prefer is the "sediment-rich rocky biotope" and are "restricted to the rocky habitat of Lion's Cove", which is on the lake's western shore (Malawi side). On the eastern shore

(Mozambique side), another very similar species, *Ps. polit tumbi*, is found at Tumbi Point. *Polit tumbi* males show a clear pattern of black, vertical bars across the body whereas *polit* males (Lion's Cove) have a solid, bluish-white body. *Polits* were most often observed at depths of 5-12 meters and reported to graze on *aufwuchs* (Ribbink et al 1983b). Adult size for males is 3-1/2 to 4" with females being slightly smaller.

Standard water parameters, aquascaping and diet for Mbuna apply. At least 3 females should be kept per male and only one male should be kept in tanks smaller than 75 Gal. Every source I have reviewed indicates that the male *polit* must be high in the pecking order to show his full brilliant colors. All sources agree that if he is upset, his mask will disappear and his colors will fade to a dull blue hue until the source of his agitation is rectified.

Personal experiences:

I first received a young adult F1 foursome from fellow

HCCC member, Chiu Lee (Sharkie), several months ago. One was assuredly a male, one was definitely a female (she was holding), the third was most likely female, but the fourth was somewhat of a question mark as to its gender. They were placed in a 45 Gal. breeder tank with a quad of *Cynotilapia afra* (Cobue) purchased from Chiu at the same time. These two groups were already tank mates, albeit in a much larger tank. After several weeks in their new home the male *polit* had not colored up and all seemed highly skittish. They spent most of their time hiding in the rocks. This gave the fish of unknown gender an opportunity to begin to flash his true colors-his mask began to show and his drab coloration began to change.



Photo By Nick Andreola

About this time I received a group of six 1-1/2" Lab. perlmutts from fellow HCCC member, Greg Steeves (Gas), and decided to add them to this tank. It seems all the new activity settled the nerves of the *polits*. They began to swim more freely and the male began to wear his finest with regularity. This was bad news for the other male and he has taken a beating; he will be removed soon.

An interesting thing about the sub/dom male is that he seems to initiate face to face confrontations more often than the dominant male does, even though he always is the one to get the short end of the stick in these encounters. The only fish the dominant *polit* male leaves entirely alone is the male *afra*. All the rest of the inhabitants get a full color fin stretch and more often than not a high-speed chase around the rocks. Most get short chases, but the *polit* females get the extended version. They generally seem to know where the male is and try to stay away from him. The females seem to have a

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limit, however; I have seen the larger of the two females turn and lock jaws with the male, giving him more of a battle than the sub/dom male, until the male backed off and swam away. The females are not aggressive to each other and spend a fair amount of time 'schooling' with the female afra and the juvenile perlmutts in the open upper waters.

The male holds his colors pretty much constantly now, and I'm curious to see if this will change when I remove the sub/dom male. The male's color pattern is well documented and I can only add that his lateral line is more obvious than on any other species I have kept. There seems to be at least two color types of females I have seen researching this report. One shows more blue coloration in their body and fins. I have the type that shows more of a rusty orange-brown coloration, especially in the head and belly. There is an appealing purplish-blue hue to their bodies and caudal fins. Their lips are quite a bit lighter (almost white) but I don't know if this is "normal" or caused by some activity such as th lip locking with the male. Fry are solid colored with the orange being more predominant than the brown. After about one month to six weeks, the orange tone fades somewhat and a dark, almost black, horizontal bar from the center of caudle peduncle to the gill cover appears. I have yet to be able to determine through coloration, or behavior, any gender differences in the fry.

The female that was holding when I first brought these fish home seemed to not want to spit them out. She was the first fish I ever stripped. She produced about 12 fry. The smaller female surprised me by spitting earlier than I anticipated (I've got to get a calendar and start making notes!). I notice her fry in the community tank one morning drinking a cup of coffee. I was



able to capture 4 of the 5 survivors and move them to a fry only tank. The fifth one would not cooperate with the rescue effort and has managed to stay alive swimming with the big fish. It has actually prospered and is slightly larger than it's rescued siblings.

Conclusion:

Ps. politis are a colorful and interesting species to keep if you plan for the male's aggressive behavior. Tanks smaller than 36" long are not recommended and I think the 45 Gal. BR I am using is as small as I would go. The tank should have as many rocks and

plants (get some cuttings of *Decorous plasticus* from Dave Hansen) as possible. Plan for a single male and at least 3 females. I would not mix politis with any Haps, peacocks, or other non-Mbuna type from Lake Malawi. I don't know enough about Tanganyikan species to make any observations other than I am unaware of any species that would be happy with this level of aggression. I might try a mix with a Victorian species, like *Pundamilia*, but would make sure the *Pundamilia* are larger than the polit male when setting up the tank. The C. afra and Lab. perlmutts are doing well in this tank and the only advice I can offer for other tank mates is to monitor your tank's population closely to see if the species you choose to mix with politis are able to thrive.

— by Nick Andreola