

Species Profile: *Pundamilia pundamilia*

Formerly known as the Zebra nyererei, *Pundamilia pundamilia* hails from numerous locations in Lake Victoria. Most known locale variants are restricted to the southern portion of Lake Victoria, Mwanza Gulf specifically. Most *Pundamilia pundamilia* variants display little differentiation in regards to coloration and morphology. The *Pundamilia pundamilia* species we have in the hobby are believed to be a Makobe Island variant. There is a *Pundamilia pundamilia*-like cichlid found in the northeastern region of Lake Victoria. It is unknown at this time if this is a *Pundamilia* variant or a similar species that may have evolved in a parallel manner.

Pundamilia pundamilia was used in interesting laboratory experiments in conjunction with *Pundamilia nyererei*. This series of experiments was meant to test the theory that haplochromine cichlid rely primarily on sight recognition involving mate selection.

Male *pundamilia pundamilia* can vary greatly in terms of coloration dependant on mood. As with most haplochromine cichlids, the advent of mating brings out a males most vibrant dress. Body coloration is generally black on the underbelly running into 4-8 vertical stripes. Striping is seen on the females of the species as well and differ very little from *Pundamilia nyererei*. The body itself can be jet black to grey. This color pattern is where the fish obtained the "zebra nyererei" moniker. The dorsal fin exhibits a bright blue coloration in the anterior merging to brilliant red towards the rear. A red edging runs the length of the dorsal. The caudal fin is red as well. The anal fin of *Pundamilia pundamilia* can be red to orange with many intermediate variations. Numerous occuli adorn the anal fin. An incaved cranial slope merges to a pointed snout. Unicuspid teeth in the outer row in this insectivore's mouth aid in feeding on may flies and other small animals. Ideal habitat for *Pundamilia pundamilia* is a steep slope near shore with large boulders making up deep crevices.

In captivity *Pundamilia pundamilia* can obtain a length

in excess of 10cm and can be aggressive towards it's own as well as other species. An aquarium of 55 gallon will house a colony of *Pundamilia pundamilia* nicely. Large rounded river rocks on a small grain gravel substrate should make this beautiful cichlid quite comfortable. Suitable tank mates can include various *Synodontis* species, some of the smaller mbuna such as *Pseudotropheus flavus* or *Pseudotropheus demasoni*. They will mix well with most of the *Auloncara* species as well. We have maintained our colonies with *Astatotilapia latifasciata*, *Lipochromis* sp. "matumbi hunter", *Ptyochromis salmon* and others. So long as there are members of both sexes in the colony, hybridization is not a huge worry. For obvious reasons, one should probably avoid the other *Pundamilia* species as well as some of the darker colored Victorians such as *Haplochromis* sp. "blue back". All *Pundamilia* are undemanding in regards to food requirement and will accept most foods readily. A good quality flake coupled with occasional treats of brine shrimp will bring *Pundamilia pundamilia* into condition quickly.

Spawning occurs in the typical haplochromine manner with the male displaying to a ripe female in a series of shimmies. The male will try to lure the female into his



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selected spawning area all the while defending the spot against all who make the mistake of venturing near. After numerous dry runs, the male and female circle one another. The female drops an egg or two and quickly turns to pick them up. The male, slanted at an angle, displays his anal fin against the substrate. This seems to entice the female into thinking the males oculi are her own eggs. When she mouths at them, attempting to pick them into her mouth, the male releases his milt. When the female has released all her eggs she will try to find a secluded spot to recover and avoid the males unending advances. The larvae will become free swimming and be released from the mother's buccal cavity on or around day 18. The fry are easily reared on crushed flake and Cyclop-eeze. Spawns can yield between 15 and 40 fry. The young grow to sexual maturity in 10 months. *Pundamilia pundamilia*, like many other Victorian haplochromines, are more avid producers when young.

Pundamilia pundamilia are not always the easiest fish to locate, but if you are interested in a beautiful undemanding species to adorn your tank, this jewel might be just what you are looking for.



Pundamilia pundamilia spawning

Photo by Greg Steeves

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