

Species Profile: *Pundamilia* sp. "red head"

Pundamilia sp. "red head" is a unique and beautiful fish from the southern end of Lake Victoria. There are apparently only two locales where populations of this *Pundamilia* species reside. The Mabibi Islands are a home to a variant of *Pundamilia* sp. "red head". To my knowledge, this particular variant has never made it to the hobby. It is reportedly more elongated with a shorter head, but similar in coloration to the other variant that hails from Zue Island in Speke Gulf. This is the fish familiar to aquarists as *Pundamilia* sp. "red head". This species has also been called *Pundamilia* sp. "Zue Island" or "Zue Island red head nyererei".

It is possible that *Pundamilia* sp. "red head" is not an actual nyererei variant. The genus *Pundamilia* was validated by Seehausen and Lippisch in 1998. Six to eight vertical bars are visible on the body (albeit faint), but the Zue Island red head has a much higher body profile than any nyererei variants I am aware of. The belly region is orange and fades to yellow then pink towards the dorsal. The section of the body above the anal fin is green. A lighter blaze runs across the spine. Bottom lip is lightly colored a white blue. Basic face coloration is pink. Three faded bars run across the forehead. The throat region is deep red and merges into the pink of the face. A faded vertical bar runs across the face and through the eye. The dorsal fin is bright blue lined and spotted red as it extends. The tail fin is transparent and red colored. The anal fin is a blue green with three to five egg spots. Pelvic fins are black along the first two fin rays and fade to lightly colored red. Maximum size of *Pundamilia* sp. "red head" is around four inches.

At Zue Island, *Pundamilia* sp. "red head" is found in the area between the shore and water not more than 15 feet deep. This shallow water gem can be found over a rocky bottom amidst schools of algae grazing *Neochromis*. No *Pundamilia nyererei* types inhabit their range. *Pundamilia* sp. "red head" at Zue Island is an aufwuchs grazer. Other species in the aquarium hobby

from Zue Island include *Paralabidochromis chilotes* and *Paralabidochromis chromogenys*.

In the aquarium, *Pundamilia* sp. "red head" is undemanding. They are not as aggressive as other *Pundamilia* variants and in a tank with nyererei variants, care must be taken as they can easily be bullied. Suitable Victorian tank mates might include *Neochromis rufocaudalis*, *Xystichromis* sp. "flameback", or *Haplochromis* sp. "Kenya gold". Be certain to carefully observe any mixing of fish from this region. Try to include species of differing body shape and coloration. Any commercial high quality flake food, brine shrimp,



Photo By Greg Steeves

and algae tabs should adequately suffice for nutrition. A good regimen is to occasionally mix food sources. A carotene based color flake will cause dominant males to literally glow.

Provided that no overly robust species are housed with *Pundamilia* sp. "red head", spawning occurs readily. As with the other haplochromines of Lake Victoria, the Zue Island red head is a mouth brooder. The eggs are quite small so an adult female would be able to incubate a good sized batch. My spawns thus far have been

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small, in the 8-14 fry range, but I suspect that before long broods of near 50 will be possible.

Pundamilia sp. "red head" is not a common species in the hobby. It is available from some specialty breeders. Certainly when more hobbyists are exposed to this wonderful little fish, demand for it will increase. The Zue Island red head is one of the many furu from the ecologically threatened Lake Victoria. Although it appears to remain in good numbers within it's range, man has proven time and time again how quickly he can cause the extinctions of creatures he shares the earth with through blatant disregard for their habitat. Let's hope we can keep captive populations strong and thriving for many years to come.

References:

Seehausen, O. Lake Victoria Rock Cichlids.

1996 Verduyn Cichlids. pp. 100-128.

Fermon, Y. Conversation.



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