

Species Profile: *Tropheus moori* Bemba Orange Flame

Tropheus moori Bembas are native to Lake Tanganyika. In the Cichlid trade *Tropheus moori* Bembas are known as Orange Flames. In their natural habitat Orange Flames can be found in rocky areas in Lake Tanganyika. In the aquarium environment *Tropheus* love moving through the various openings in the rock formations that I had in my 75 gallon tank, as well as, eating algae that grew on the rocks. I obtained six Orange Flames from Armke's Rare African Fish located in New Braunfels, Texas. When I acquired them they were approximately 1" long. When young, Orange Flames are a blackish grey with a light vertical orange marking located in the middle of the body. In adulthood, Orange Flames acquire a body that is deep black with a pronounced orange vertical band on the middle of the body. Their bodies are torpedo shaped with the head being larger and very round. Coloration in both males and females is virtually the same with the dominant male having a more distinct orange band. *Tropheus* have a reputation for being very aggressive and very active in the aquarium environment and should not be kept with more peaceful cichlids. I have noticed aggressive behavior on many occasions, which is why I will state that anyone wanting to maintain *Tropheus* should have a colony with at least 12, or unless the aquarium they will be housed in is large (6 feet in length or greater) a fewer number can be maintained. The aquarium should also have many hiding places so that less dominant *Tropheus* can recover from any bullying males or females. It should also be noted that along with Orange Flames I kept other types of *Tropheus* in the same tank. At the time all of my *Tropheus* were kept in a 75 gallon tank.

I have had three successful spawns with Orange Flames. Two of the spawns occurred in my 75 gallon tank and the last spawn, which I will write about in this article, occurred in my 240 gallon tank. I was able to raise 5 Orange Flames from each spawn. Each spawn produced approximately 12 eggs. When I acquired the 240 gallon tank last Spring I had already decided to get rid of all of my *Tropheus* with the exception of my Or-

ange Flames. I placed all six of them in the 240 gallon aquarium, noting that the size of the tank should displace the aggression has previously noted. After placing them in their new home I noticed that 1 of the Orange Flames was not eating, of course I realized quickly that I had a problem. I tried to medicate the single Orange Flame but to no avail he soon perished. I ended losing 3 others to the dreaded disease (we all know which disease I am referring to) leaving me with only 2 survivors, a lone male and female. I believe the losses occurred because the tank was new and was not completely established. In addition, the substrate is very difficult to clean since the size of the Aragonite grains are quite small and tend to be picked up by the siphon quite easily. *Tropheus* need very clean tanks and the substrate needs to be siphoned to remove a large majority of the detritus. It was devastating for me to lose my Orange Flames since they had been under my care for two years. Needless to say, my single pair spawned. I ended up losing the male shortly afterwards. However, I waited and noticed that the female was holding for quite some time, unfortunately she was not holding long enough before I stripped her of her young. I noticed that a considerable amount of the yolk sack was still remaining. Out of the 12 fry I was only able to raise 5 successfully. I believe the survival rate was low because the fry were not kept in a capacity that would allow them to be 'tumbled' with a large amount of aeration. If I had 'tumbled' the fry I might have had a higher survival rate. I have found that when there is a considerable amount of yolk sack remaining on fry, fungus is able to envelop the yolk sack, which can lead to a premature death.

The 75 gallon has a substrate that is a light brown and rounded with no sharp edges, which is perfect for *Tropheus*. The substrate is used in commercial applications as blast sand. The substrate in the 240 gallon is Aragonite. Both aquariums have holey rock for shelter and hiding places. Neither tank has live plants or plastic plants. Both tanks are filtered by Eheim 2217's.

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The temperature in both tanks is maintained between 78 and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The pH in the tanks is unknown since I have never tested the water. I perform weekly water changes equal to 15% of the tank volume. I use fluorescent lighting for duration of approximately 14 hours each day. I feed my cichlids New Life Spectrum pellet and Ocean Nutrition flake.

The spawning habits of Orange Flames can at times be aggressive. The male will chase the female until she is ready to spawn. In some instances I have had to remove the female because the damage inflicted on the female was extensive.

When a spawn does occur the male flutters, shakes, and shimmies around the female to entice her to spawn. The female will then release an egg to be immediately taken up by the female. The spawn will occur in the open. What is interesting about the spawn is that other cichlids will not intervene in order to make a meal of the eggs once laid by the female. I have a dominant male *Cyrtocara moori* that bullies other males when spawning in the 240, but for some reason he will not interfere with the *Tropheus*. The process will usually yield about 20 eggs by my estimates. The eggs of *Tropheus* are quite large which is why *Tropheus* spawns do not yield great numbers. The eggs are cream colored in appearance. The female will hold the eggs for approximately 3-4 weeks. I have noticed that the female will take little bits of food during the incubation process which is something that is not too common with female cichlids. I will strip the female of her babies once I think the time is ready for the babies to feed on their own and will be safely raised in a fry tank (however during the last spawn I obtained the fry prematurely). The fry are quite large after release and are light black/grey with a very subtle band that is a light grey in the middle of the body. I have



Photo By Spencer Jack

noticed that *Tropheus* fry grow very quickly over time. In 2 months they can obtain a size that is close to 1", whereas it will take my *Calvus* at least 9 months to obtain a size that is close to 1". The fry tank uses a sponge filter for filtration and the fry are fed crushed flake food. I

have also recently started feeding the fry freeze dried *Daphnia*.

I would recommend *Tropheus* for the more advanced cichlid enthusiast. They are very susceptible to bloat. Some keepers of *Tropheus* attribute their susceptibility to bloat on several factors:

- 1) Infrequent water changes
- 2) Changes in the aquarium environment producing stress on

Tropheus

- 3) Feeding inappropriate foods (*Tropheus* are vegetarians)
- 4) Bullying by other *Tropheus*

I believe the most important of the items noted above is to maintain a clean tank (change water once per week, as well as, siphoning the substrate), and feeding *Tropheus* the right kinds of food. If you adhere to the above you should have few problems with keeping *Tropheus*.

In concluding, I currently do not maintain *Tropheus*, but I have at least learned from my experience with them. In the future I will probably obtain a colony, especially if I am able to obtain more room for another tank (with my wife's approval of course).

— by David Dockwiller