

Species Profile: *Tropheus* sp. “Black”

I had always wondered what it would be like to keep *Tropheus*. I had heard of the many tragedies experienced by hobbyists as they tried their luck with these sensitive fish. I had been keeping cichlids for quite some time and began to wonder if I was ready. I was advised by a friend to hold off. In his words, “you have the rest of your life to keep fish, why not wait”. I took his advice and waited. In the meantime I experimented with other fish but eventually my thoughts turned back to *Tropheus*.

A couple years passed and I was finally ready to take the plunge. I had an established tank and more important, a source with enough fish of one species to start out with a good size colony.

It was difficult deciding which type of *Tropheus* to go with. To be honest, I wish I had 20 more tanks so I could keep all the species and variants that I wanted. I finally settled on what is commonly referred to as Bemba Orange Flame. Their black body with a bright vertical orange bar make them a very attractive fish.

I emptied out my 75 gal Tanganyikan community tank for them. I moved some species to other tanks and bagged up my *Cyprichromis leptosoma* colony for trade. John Yull took my Cyps and gave me a great deal on 30 *Tropheus*. They ranged in size from about one inch to two inches. I later picked up 5 more one inch juveniles to bring my colony to 35.

This number seemed like a lot, but I was anticipating losses and didn't want to have to add to an established colony later for fear of aggression/stress related deaths. As it turns out, I have been very fortunate and my main colony has remained unchanged.

The fish are kept in the 75 gal tank with sand substrate and several anubia plants. There are 3 different rock areas and each seems to have a dominant male although one of these 3 males is arguably dominant over the other two. 2 to 3 times a day they are feed a mixture of flake with a high spirulina con-

tent. Occasionally they are given Dainichi veggie pellets. They are always very eager to eat and accept anything they are given greedily.

Water changes are done at least once a week usually about 20-25% of the tank volume. The water is just dechlorinated and a dash of Seachem Cichlid Salt is added. Usually well below what is recommended on the bottle. The pH comes out of the tap at about 7.8-8.0 and I do nothing to modify it. I think it is more important to keep things constant than to try to artificially raise the pH to match what is found in their native Lake Tanganyika.

I can sit and watch my *Tropheus* for hours. They are constantly active. Sometime swimming together while other times they all seem to be doing their own thing. Occasionally the males will lock lips or chase each other around, but with such a large group, no individual fish gets singled out.

When not swimming around like crazy, they spend their time trying to pick algae off of the rocks. Unfortunately I have been unsuccessful in growing a good coat of green



Photo by Robert De Leon

algae on the rocks. They seem to pick at the rocks out of instinct. They have a few tank mates which include 2 gobies, 4 *Synodontis petricola* and a few bristlenose plecos. These other species are completely ignored by the *Tropheus*.

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Within several months of getting the fish, the larger ones began showing signs of spawning. I watched several females hold for almost an entire month, but never saw any fry. I assumed they got eaten shortly after being released. I decided that I would try and strip some of the females in an effort to save the fry. This was easier said than done.

At any given time, several of the fish (usually the dominant males) are in full dress. Their heads and tails are a deep black with their orange strip clearly defined. The other fish, depending on their mood, are somewhere between full dress and at light brown. Well as the net enters the water, they all turn brown and switch to hyper-speed. It is very difficult to single out a particular female. After many attempts I was finally able to net one. Unlike other mouthbrooders, I found *Tropheus* very difficult to strip due to the positioning of their mouth. I finally managed to get her to surrender her brood and out came 4 well developed and very large fry.

The fry were moved to a 20 gallon growout tank. I was later able to catch another female and even some recently released fry that had survived in the rockwork. They are feed the same flake as the parents about 3 times a day. They grow quickly and even at a young age, their aggressiveness is clearly visible.

I have found that keeping *Tropheus* is more rewarding than I ever imagined. I am now considering converting another tank. If you decide to you ready to give them a try, make sure you can get a large, young group at one time. You also have to make sure your water quality is a top priority and that their diet is high in vegetable/plant matter.

— by *Robert De Leon*



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