

# Labeotropheus fuelleborni

*By Greg Steeves*

The "fuelleborni" is one of my favorite African cichlids. When I started out keeping "riflers" about twenty years ago, this was one of the first species I tried. I had very limited literature on fish, no access to anything like the internet, and no aquarium society in my community, but this gem is quite forgiving and the success I encountered paved the way for my psychotic interest in mbuna.

My initial setup was a 15 gallon planted tank with six fuelleborni fry. The fry grew, the plants became salad, and I noticed that these fish are territorial! I set up a 33 gallon with shale made into caves, and before long I noticed a fish with a big problem; a huge lump in her throat. I isolated her in the 15 gallon so she wouldn't infect the other fish in the tank. All attempts at feeding were ignored, I was beside myself. Numerous trips to the local pet shops turned up nothing (no local stores carried African cichlids at that time), and instead of treating this fish I decided not to do anything and hope for the best.

A short time later disaster really struck, another of my fish had come down with "bump in the throat" disease! I frantically scooped this fish out and put her in the isolation tank. While I was transferring this fish I noticed the originally "infected" fish seemed to be better. All was not lost. I offered some food and sick fish #1 greedily

ate. I thought that maybe she was well enough to go back in the community tank. I got out the net and went after her. In the process, I snagged a rock and couldn't believe my eyes. Some tiny creature was in the tank too! This must have been the cause of the disease, some parasite that had completed it's larval stage, and was now mature, probably ready to spread more disease. Out came the rubber gloves, this creature wasn't going to burrow into my hand! When I lifted the rock I got a big surprise, underneath was a dozen tiny fish! How could this be? The impossible was the only answer, these fish had spawned and the female had carried the brood in her mouth.



The next week I went on a trip to Montreal. The first shop I went to had a huge supply of African cichlids in a multitude of colors. I found the man tending to this section and he explained to me the typical breeding method of mbuna. I felt very stupid but at the same time, learned more about these fish than I had since I'd been keeping them. I was hooked! I left the shop with more African cichlids and a headache; information overload!

In the years since then, Labeotropheus fuelleborni has remained one of my favorites. These fish grow to around six inches, and males get slightly larger than females. Two

color varieties are most common, the solid blues, and marble. Most marbled fish are female but every now and then a spawn will produce a prize, a male marbled. When mature this fish has brown, blue, and greenish marbled pattern on a pink background. The fins will have a blue hue to them, a real gem. I'd guess about one fish in a hundred will be like this.

The fuelleborni has an under-slung mouth much like a *Tropheus* from Lake Tanganyika. Both fish are heavy algae eaters in nature, grazing on rocks. Distinctive to fuelleborni are their snout, a fleshy growth above their mouth. They are not overly aggressive for an African cichlid but are territorial and do need their own



space, especially males. They are easily fed and reared on good quality flake with a spirulina content. Lettuce and frozen peas are heartily accepted also. These fish should be kept in high population densities

as a lone male is likely to harass anything he can. Crowding deviates aggression. Instead of pestering one fish all the time, a male will bug many fish giving subdominant fish at least a little time to relax.

Fuelleborni are a forgiving fish, not particular on water quality, or fussy eaters. They are easily spawned and grow quickly. Give them a try.